Appendix D: *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* by William S. Pollitzer

Note: *The late Dr. William S. Pollitzer, at the request of the Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study Team, prepared a synopsis of his book. The text to follow, included in this report with permission of University of Georgia Press, provides the reader with an overview of Pollitzer's work. This portion of the report may not be duplicated without written permission from the University of Georgia Press.*

Preface

I was born in Charleston, South Carolina, where my grandfather had been a cotton factor and my aunts continued to live. After my father, a pediatrician, had moved to the Up Country, it was always a joy to return to the Low Country and this unique, historic city. But I knew little of the "darker side" of life there, the black folks. Much later, my studies in anthropology and genetics at Columbia University raised questions about the people called the "Gullah Negroes," who had lived for almost three centuries along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Where did they come from, how closely were they related to their ancestors, and how had they developed their unique speech and culture?

My visits to Salvador in Bahia, Brazil, for lectures and research revealed the rich heritage of those of African descent, mixed with Indians and whites, who had kept alive the language and practices from specific areas of Africa. This stimulated me to learn more about the origins, history, and distinctive characteristics of the Gullah people who had been isolated in the Tidewater region. My inquiry revealed their African heritage, the relative proportion of different ethnic groups there, and their influence on genetics, health, language, social structure, and many arts and crafts. Plants and parasites from Africa also came with the slave trade to the Low Country, with profound effects.

This report is based upon my book, *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*, University of Georgia Press, 1999, which also contains more tables and maps, as well as figures, pictures, a chronology, citations, notes, and bibliography. In brief, it illustrates why the Tidewater region, from Georgetown, S. C., through Georgia and into Florida, is worthy of special designation, and the culture of African Americans who live there worthy of preservation, protection, and interpretation to the public.

William S. Pollitzer
October, 2001

Chapter 1 Flesh and Blood

"His name's not really Sunday. We just call him that 'cause he's born on Sunday."

So said the black men to this author about the driver of the truck as we drove over Hilton Head Island one summer day in 1954. This typical African naming practice had survived among the Gullah people on this sea island near Savannah off the coast of Georgia. The men pointed sadly to the soil and beach where they and their ancestors had farmed and fished for generations. Whites were then beginning to buy up their land, soon to be covered by golf courses and condominiums. The retention of the old had met the challenge of the new. Although the marsh and dikes of the old rice plantations still persist, the Carolina coast is vastly different today from what it was a century ago. Changes in the last half- century especially threaten the Gullah people and their way of life. As Emory Campbell, Director of Penn Center on St. Helena Island expressed it: "We are the endangered species."

The homeland of the Gullah stretches 250 miles along the Tidewater from Georgetown in South Carolina, through Georgia and into Florida, where the people developed in relative isolation. Not only their distinctive speech and many cultural traits indicate their close affinity to African ancestors, but also biologically the sea island blacks, a mixture of many strains, are chiefly African, with some white and Native American genes.

Faces and Genes from Africa.

Physical anthropologists once divided mankind into distinct races; today they recognize gradients or clines in all biological traits instead. Single- gene traits like blood factors prove to be a better measure of migration and admixture of populations than do measures of morphology.

In the 1920s Herskovits measured twenty- six physical features of adult black males, most of them in Howard University and Harlem, and found them intermediate between Africans and Europeans. Eighty percent of them reported mixed ancestry, usually with whites, but 30 percent with Indians. Similarly, an analysis of thirty- six features of male crania, made in 1974, suggested that American blacks are three- fourths African and one- fourth European in ancestry. This contrasts sharply with the Gullah people.

Among inherited blood types, Group B is twice as common in Africans as in Europeans. Whites are 85 percent *Rh* positive, blacks are 92 percent. Most populations below the Sahara average 60 percent of the *Rho* subtype found in only 2 percent of whites. Absence of the Duffy blood factor (*Fy*) in blacks, common in other people, is responsible for their immunity to vivax malaria.

The frequency of these and other genetic markers, such as red blood cell factors *M, S, Jk*, and *K*, and certain inherited proteins in blood plasma, show, as the physical traits did, that African Americans in northern cities have about one- fourth white ancestry. Compare this with admixture based on inherited blood factors of 479 women and 57 men observed by this author in the clinics of the Medical College in Charleston in the 1950s. One- third were born in the city of Charleston, over two- thirds in Charleston County, and 95 percent in the coastal tier of counties. Of their parents, 60 percent were natives of the county and 85 percent were from the coastal strip; in half the cases father, mother, and subject came from the same location. The people studied were thus undoubtedly descendants of those brought to the region centuries before, although some migration among them was present even then. Only about 6 percent of their genes came from non- African ancestry, far less than that elsewhere in the country.

Apolipoproteins are inherited proteins attached to fat molecules in blood plasma. Many genetically controlled variants of them, identified by size, density, and electric charge, have been identified. Like blood types, the genes for them vary in frequency in different populations, some present only in whites and others only in blacks. Analysis of apolipoproteins of Nigerians and African Americans

show significantly more white admixture in blacks of Pittsburgh than in blacks of four coastal Carolina counties − Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester, and Colleton. The genes found only in whites are rarer in Carolina than in Pittsburgh; most of those found only in blacks are more frequent in Carolina. White admixture of blacks of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, determined from blood factors, contrasts sharply with that of African Americans in cities of the north and west.

Physical features are in agreement with the findings from genetics: measurement of skin pigment, stature, sitting height, nose width, face width, lip thickness, and prognathism show that the black coastal Carolinians more closely resemble sub- Saharan Africans than other African Americans do. The sea island blacks thus contrast greatly with those studied by Herskovits. In both morphology and inherited blood factors the Gullah are closer to western Africa and further removed from whites than are other African Americans.

That Sick as Hell Anemia

Abnormal hemoglobins in the coastal blacks tell an even more striking story of their African kinship. In a youngster with sickle cell anemia, jagged red blood cells course through capillaries causing severe pain and early death. No wonder it is known in Charleston as that "sick as hell anemia." Caused by abnormal genes inherited from both parents (SS), it contrasts with normal hemoglobin (AA) and with the benign trait in carriers (AS), who inherit an abnormal gene from only one parent. Hemoglobin C follows the same genetic laws and similar processes but causes a milder disease. The hemoglobin molecule, responsible for carrying oxygen to the tissues, consists of home surrounded by alpha and beta globing chains. Both sickle cell and hemoglobin C disease result from abnormal beta chains. In contrast, thalassemia is an inherited disease that results from a decrease of production of normal hemoglobin chains; of two varieties, that affecting beta globin chains causes a more serious illness than that affecting alpha chains.

Sickle cell hemoglobin occurs in a wide belt through equatorial Africa. The trait (AS) varies from 12 percent in Senegambia through 15 percent in Ghana to more than 20 percent in Nigeria and Central Africa. Hemoglobin C trait (AC) reaches a high of 13 percent in Ghana and neighboring Benin, falls off sharply in adjacent regions, and is virtually absent in Central Africa. Beta thalassemia trait is about 8 percent in Liberia and rarer in other areas. The sickle cell trait is present in about 8 percent of African Americans, Hemoglobin C trait in 2 percent, and beta thalassemia in less than one percent.

Over half a century ago Paul Switzer, then an intern at the Roper Hospital in Charleston, found 14 percent sickle cell trait in red blood cells of sea island blacks. Many subsequent surveys found an even higher incidence in Charleston County, similar to that in Africa and twice as high as in African Americans generally. Three percent Hemoglobin C and one percent beta thalassemia demonstrate the role of West Africa in the ancestry of the Gullah people.

In the presence of deadly *falciparum* malaria, those with such abnormal hemoglobins are protected from the parasite causing it. Carriers, with one normal and one abnormal gene (AS), live longer than both those with the anemia (SS) and those with normal hemoglobin (AA); when they reproduce they keep the sickle cell gene in the population. The importance of this selective advantage of abnormal hemoglobin is dramatically illustrated by the history of blacks in the Low Country from 1684 into the 1940s.

Variations along the Coast

Abnormal hemoglobins reflect differences among populations of coastal blacks. Those of Georgia counties average 9 percent sickle cell trait, with a high of 14 percent on Sapelo Island. Those of South Carolina counties have 12 percent, but Charleston County averages 15 percent, far greater than elsewhere in the United States. This probably reflects both their relatively unmixed African ancestry and the selective pressure from malaria that maintained the high frequency of this genetic trait. Gene

frequencies of abnormal hemoglobins of Charleston blacks are similar to those of many African countries and much greater than those of other African Americans. However, variations in frequency of inherited blood factors do occur among the counties of the South Carolina and Georgia Low Country and even within Charleston County.

The Charleston Heart Study, begun in the 1960s, determined many medical and biological variables, including skin color, ABO and *Rho* blood types, and hemoglobin variants, among people of the county, subdivided by race and by residence in city, suburbs, and rural areas. The findings are important for the African origins and later distribution of people on the coast.

The rural men and women are darker than the city dwellers. Although this could be influenced by their greater exposure to sunlight, the higher frequency of *Rho* and *Hb. AS* suggests less white admixture, as expected from their history. The people on the sea islands southwest of the city are darkest of all and have 69 percent *Rho*, 20 percent Group B, 24 percent *Hb. AS*, and one percent *Hb. AC*, all suggestive of close African affinity.

Biological variables should be helpful in the search for origins of the sea island people, but physical features are too blended, genetic markers too intermediate, and data from Africa too sparse to connect them directly with some specific region of that continent. Similar blood types and Hb. S frequencies are found in many areas from Senegal to Angola; Hb. C frequency, however, does suggest a genetic contribution from the area around Ghana. If many inhabitants of the Sea Islands south of Charleston came from African regions where people had dark skin color, high Rho, modest Group B, high sickle cell trait, and some Hb. C, and remained relatively isolated and unmixed, it could account for the traits observed. Nigeria, which has been linked with Wadmalaw Island by language and customs, is one possibility. Only further surveys of genetic markers and historical research on both sides of the Atlantic could solve this mystery.

New techniques of molecular biology hold out hope for unraveling the genetic history of the Gullah. Four haplotypes, or clusters of genes, are known for sickle cell hemoglobin in African populations: Senegal, Benin, Cameroon, and Bantu (or CAR for Central African Republic), named for the region where first found and most abundant. Among southeastern American blacks the Benin type is most common (56 percent), followed by Bantu (19 percent) and Senegal (15 percent). For comparing the coastal Carolina population with African ancestors such haplotype frequencies, not yet fully known, would be enormously valuable.

A survey of black families on James Island just outside the city of Charleston confirmed earlier findings, except that the people were found to be slightly more admixed with whites. That study also gave new insights into the inheritance of thalassemia and provided data on the structure and genetics of the teeth of the Gullah people that further reflect their African heritage.

Teeth Make an Impression

Teeth fascinate anthropologists. With highly heritable variations in shape and size, and preservation long after other traces of the body have disintegrated, teeth are useful in describing populations living and dead. Fine details of structure also reveal information on diet and health.

As part of a large study of the genetic basis of adult dentition, Menegaz- Bock measured teeth in 391 people in seventy- six black families on James Island. The pattern of their dentition differs from that of Seminole Indians and other Native American populations, but resembles that of Africans and other African Americans. The teeth of blacks, both in Africa and in America, are larger than those of whites. In length (mesio- distal dimension) the front teeth, incisors and canines, are smaller, but the back teeth, premolars and molars, are larger. In width (bucco- lingual dimension) the reverse is true; the front teeth are thicker but the back ones are thinner than in whites.

The data from Africa, unfortunately mostly from areas outside the slave trade region, reveal teeth somewhat smaller than those of the sea islanders. One crude measure of size is the sum of the length of the teeth. At 119 mm. the Gullah teeth are exceeded in overall size only by those of one group of Bantu; they are bigger than the dentition of other Africans and African Americans. Tooth width shows a similar sequence. In their pattern, the Gullah teeth are similar to those of five other American black populations analyzed, but larger; some features of their molars and premolars show their resemblance to Africans.

Size alone does not tell the whole story. One notable and highly heritable feature, common in Asiatics and American Indians, present in some Africans, but rare in whites, is a scooped out or shovel shape to the back of the incisors. Its average depth in the central incisors of Seminole Indians is 1.00 mm; in the blacks on James Island it is 0.63 mm. a finding consistent with their African ancestry with some white and Indian admixture.

Thus, morphology, red cell blood types, plasma proteins, hemoglobin variants, and dentition of the sea island blacks present a consistent picture of a predominantly African people with minimal white and Indian admixture, and with indications of genetic contributions from the western bulge of the continent. To solve the puzzle of the formation of the Gullah people on the coast of Carolina and Georgia, and to give them pride in their heritage, it is necessary to turn back to Africa and the rich diversity of its geography, people, history, culture, and language.

Chapter 2 Exodus: The In-Human Trade

"You've come home!"

With that friendly welcome the natives of Sierra Leone greeted the visitors from the Carolina Sea Islands, who soon joyously recognized speech, basketry, songs, musical instruments, and the manner of tossing fishing nets so familiar to them. But when this Gullah delegation visited Bance Island off the shore, where ocean- going ships had loaded their slave ancestors, their voices fell silent and their faces showed grief. Buildings still stand along the African coast as grim reminders of the transoceanic slave trade.

To appreciate the magnitude and variation of that mass forced migration to the New World, it is necessary to understand the incredible size of Africa that Europeans called the Dark Continent. The United States could fit into it three times. In topography, climate, vegetation and people, Africa is a picture of diversity, with a tropical zone embraced by two temperate ones. Below the Sahara desert lies the Sudan of grassland and woodland; further south the Guinea Coast and the Congo River basin form the tropical rainforest. These West and Central African regions were the homeland of the ancestors of the Gullah people who differed in physique, language, and culture.

In the savannah of the western Sudan herding is combined with agriculture, manufacturing is highly specialized, markets and trade flourish, musical instruments are varied, Islam is influential, and linguistic chaos abounds. On the Guinea Coast, agriculture is intensive, crops from Malaysia and America fueled a population explosion, markets and craft guilds are well developed, art reached its zenith; and languages are varied. The Congo culture area, following the expansion of the Bantu into Central Africa, is supported by shifting agriculture, bark cloth, ceremonial drums, religion stressing death, sculpture, and the paramount importance of kinship. Here, and in some of the Guinea Coast, dense and hostile vegetation separates villages; disease has had its greatest impact in this unhealthy and forbidding environment.

More than 750 languages of Africa, classified by Greenberg, make a Babel of tongues, but a knowledge of the areas where they are spoken is necessary for appreciation of the Gullah language. Prominent along the western coast are Wolof, Susu, Temne, Mende, Kpelle, and Vai; further interior are Malinke

and Bambara; and Fulani is spread over West Africa. Along the Guinea Coast are Twi, Ga, Fante (Fanti), Ewe, Fon, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Ibibio, Bini and Efik. Twi and the related Fante are called Akan languages. In the large Bantu group of Central Africa are Kongo, Kikongo, Bobangi, Luba (Tshiluba), Kimbundu, and Umbundu. The vocabulary and grammar of these languages influenced the development of Gullah.

Of some 12 million Africans shipped from Africa to the New World from the fifteenth into the nineteenth century, about 11 million arrived, a grim reminder of the death rate in the "Middle Passage." While the majority went to Latin America, almost 2 million went to the British islands in the Caribbean, especially Jamaica and Barbados. Eight coastal regions are recognized in the eighteenth century English slave trade. The first, Senegambia, includes Senegal and Gambia of today. A second, from the Casamance in the north to Cape Mount in the south, labeled Sierra Leone, includes not only that nation but also modern Guinea and Guinea- Bissau plus small parts of Senegal and Liberia. The third, the Windward Coast, stretching from Cape Mount to Assini at the western edge of Ghana, includes Liberia and the Ivory Coast, but the usage of the term varied over time. To the eighteenth-century British it meant anything westward of the Gold Coast.

The coast of Liberia, originally the Malagueta or Pepper Coast from malagueta pepper, was also known as the Grain Coast or Rice Coast. The fourth region is the Gold Coast, roughly the same as Ghana of today. Further east, beyond the Volta River, lies the fifth region, the Bight of Benin, or the Slave Coast of present- day Togo and Benin and part of Nigeria. The Bight of Biafra, including the Niger Delta plus the mouths of the Cross River and Duala River to the east in Cameroon, is the sixth region of the slave trade, bounded by the Benin River to the west and Cape Lopez in Gabon to the south. Angola in its broadest sense, including not only that nation but also Zaire, Congo- Brazzaville, part of Gabon to the north, and part of Namibia to the south, comprises a seventh region also called Central Africa. The eighth region is the southern coast, reaching up to Mozambique on the east coast of Africa and including the island of Madagascar across from it, from which few slaves probably came.

The Traffic to Charleston

Records from 200 years ago written in the careful script of the day recreate the busy times at the port of Charleston which had grown from its modest beginnings in 1670 to one of the most active ports in North America by the time of the Revolution. *The Book of Manifests* from 1784 through 1787, in the *Records of the States*, lists not only the date, entry number, ship, captain, and port of origin for vessels in the harbor, but also the merchandise, the merchant buying the goods, and the duty. Here and there listed among the other imports is the human cargo, small shipments from Bermuda or St. Thomas or other states in the newly created United States, as well as larger shipments of slaves from Angola or Gambia or the Gold Coast. Often just "Africa" appears in neat Gothic script, obscuring the specific homeland of those taken across the sea.

One can visualize the scene in the crowded harbor from the wide variety of vessels and their names: The Schooner *Grecian Lady*, the Sloop *May*, the Brigantine *Neptune*, the Ship *Fortitude*, the Cutter *Ferril*, the Bark *Molly*, and the Snow *Jean Baptista*. The names of the ships engaged in the slave trade often belie their doleful mission: *Happy Couple*, *Charming Polly*, *Delight*, *Olive- Branch*, *Relief*, *Hope*, *Providence*, *Content,* and *Friendship*. The best known names in the city of Charleston are often listed as the recipients of the slaves, such as Nathaniel Russell, whose home is a major tourist attraction today.

From the earliest days of the settlement of Carolina, black bondsmen accompanied their masters, usually from the West Indies. At least sixty- five of them entered Charles Town in its very first decade, and more soon followed. For those early years the exact count and source are difficult to determine; most ships from Barbados and neighboring islands had a few on board, their African provenience unknown.

As early as 1674 the Proprietors instructed one Andrew Percival who controlled a plantation south of the Ashley River to begin a trade with the Spaniards for "Negroes." Trade was laid open by an act of 1698, and by the end of the century direct commerce between Africa and Carolina was underway. Significantly in that same year an act encouraged white servants, because the great number of blacks imported was perceived as endangering the safety of the colony- - a note of caution heard again in succeeding years.

From the founding of Charles Town the importation grew astronomically. The total for 1706 was only 24, for 1707, 22, but by 1724 it was 604; it rose sharply in the 1740s with demands for labor for rice and indigo cultivation, and peaked in the nineteenth century.

Planters and dealers alike recognized different attributes in slaves from the various regions of Africa and expressed decided preferences. The many letters of Henry Laurens, engaged in the trade for decades in the eighteenth century until the American Revolution, reflect these perceptions and preferences.

The order of choice among South Carolina planters appears to have been Gold Coast, Gambia, Windward Coast, and Angola; Ibo from Calabar or Bonny in the Bight of Biafra were considered worst. The reasons were chiefly size, strength, or health, although temperament also counted. Real or imagined traits of behavior sometimes reinforced preferences based upon physique; alleged attributes might influence a dealer or a buyer as much as actual ones.

Coramantees from the Gold Coast were described as having extraordinary strength and symmetry, distinguished appearance, and proud bearing. They were blacker, taller, and handsomer than their fellow slaves, vigorous, muscular, hardy, and agile, intelligent, fierce, stubborn, unwilling to forgive a wrong, but loyal if their devotion were captured. Gambians were similarly tall, strong, and very dark. Senegalese were considered most intelligent and esteemed for domestic service. Mandingoes were gentle in demeanor, but sinking under fatigue. Whydahs and Pawpaws were said to be lusty, industrious, cheerful, submissive, even tempered, complacent, and obedient. Those from Congo and Angola were slender and slight, mild and honest, stupid, docile, comely, and inclined to run away. The Eboes (Ibos) were called jaundiced, sickly, unattractive, superstitious, lazy, despondent, and prone to suicide.

The profits from some voyages of the slave trade into the port at Charles Town must have been enormous to offset the losses caused by the various hazards, including disease, wars, storms, pirates, and mutinies. Graphic accounts of mutinies especially illustrate the ethnocentric viewpoint of white men and belie the conventional picture of docile black ones.

> To be SOLD Wednesday the 24th Instant September, a Parcel of choice Negroes, imported in the *Happy Couple* - - - Hill Master directly from the Coast of Guiney, by Jos. Wragg and Comp. N.B. Extraordinary Encouragement will be given for present Pay, and Payment this Crop."

This advertisement, accompanied by a small black figure, appeared in the *South Carolina Gazette*, Number 85, for September 6- 13, 1735. Hundreds of such ads printed in the Charleston newspapers from 1733- 1807, provide one excellent source of data on the number and provenience of slaves imported into Carolina.

The British Naval Office, responsible for the loading and unloading of vessels in the ports of the colonies in the eighteenth century, is another valuable source of information. Stationed at Charles Town, Georgetown and Port Royal, their record, in the elegant penmanship of the day, provides a unique insight into the commerce to and from the increasingly important colony of South Carolina. While many ships brought a few blacks from the West Indies, the record shows increasing shipments from "Africa" in large numbers.

The Records of the Public Treasurers of South Carolina list the duty on blacks imported from 1735-1774 plus the captain of the ship, the agency or importer, the source of the shipment, and the number of slaves; and the manifests in the Records of the States contains similar information from 1784- 1787.

No one source is complete, but through the use of all of them, with attention to dates, ships, captains, and origins, a fairly accurate picture can be constructed of the number of enslaved persons legally transported from eight coastal regions of Africa to Charles Town in three time periods. Early is from 1716- 1744, Middle from 1749- 1787, and Final from 1804- 1807.

In the Early Period Angola contributed half of the 22,117 slaves imported, or three- fourths of those of known African origin. The numbers from Senegambia and from the Bight of Biafra are small, and those from other areas are negligible. In the Middle Period, however, when 63,210 people were imported into Charles Town from Africa, Senegambia was responsible for one- third of the slave trade of known origin. The Windward Coast made a substantial contribution at this time followed closely by Angola and then the Gold Coast. While the total trade tripled in this second half of the eighteenth century, the actual number from Angola decreased. The people from Senegambia increased ten fold as rice and indigo cultivation began to flourish in Carolina. The number from the Gold Coast, although half that from Senegambia, saw a thirteen- fold increase over the Early Period.

In the four feverish years of the Final Period, the total number of Africans imported - - 29,461 - - far exceeded all those brought in the twenty- eight years of the Early Period, and is almost half the amount in the thirty- nine years of the Middle Period. Angola accounted for over half of the trade, followed by the Windward Coast and then by the Gold Coast, with lesser contributions from other regions.

By summing the data of the three time periods, a picture of the total African slave trade to South Carolina alone appears (see “Map 5”). When 23,000, 20 percent of the total, who cannot be assigned to a particular coastal region are omitted, some 39 percent came from Angola which includes Congo, 20 percent from Senegambia, 17 percent from the Windward Coast, and 13 percent from the Gold Coast. The contribution from Sierra Leone is only 6 percent and that from the two Bights and from Madagascar and Mozambique even less. It is of interest to see if this distribution of people imported, 60 percent from West Africa and 40 percent from Central Africa, is reflected in the speech and behavior of the sea islanders.

Role of the West Indies

One third of the known slave trade between the Caribbean islands and Charles Town took place in the Early Period, two thirds in the flourishing Middle Period, and virtually none in the Final Period. Barbados sent the greatest number, followed by St. Kitts, Antigua, Jamaica, and a dozen other Caribbean islands.

Slaves brought from the British West Indies are important for their impact on the Sea Islands because of their ethnic origins. Although these migrants were already somewhat adapted to the dominant whites by "seasoning" for a few years in the islands, they nonetheless retained the language and customs of their African homeland. Of two million Africans brought to the British Caribbean, Jamaica and Barbados received the bulk; in the eighteenth century they re- exported one- fourth to the mainland. The ethnic composition of Africans imported into Jamaica and Barbados from 1662- 1713 shows emphasis upon the role of the Gold Coast and Benin; as the century progressed, Biafra had a greater share of the trade. Of the known British slave trade from 1700 through 1807, the Bight of Biafra contributed 37 percent and the Gold Coast 13 percent, together just half of the total.

While direct importations from the Gold Coast are surprisingly modest in light of the known preference for these people in Carolina, they were thus greatly supplemented by those who came via the West Indies. To an even greater degree bondsmen from the Bights of Benin and Biafra, rare in the

direct trade, contributed indirectly via the Caribbean islands. The preponderance of the Bantu-speaking people from Congo and Angola in the Early Period, reinforced by vast numbers in later time, accounts for their influence in Carolina. But Senegambians, preferred by planters and dealers, came in sufficient numbers, especially in the Middle Period, 1749- 1787, to have a lasting effect. People from the Windward Coast also contributed appreciably in that Period as well as in the Final Period from 1804- 1807.

The ban on the slave trade to Georgia, imposed with its settlement in 1732, was lifted in 1750, but far fewer Africans entered that colony than neighboring South Carolina. Until 1766 imports to Georgia were from the West Indies and other colonies, especially South Carolina. Of an estimated 6,539 from 1755 to 1798, 2,038, one- third, came from the Caribbean. Of 3,680 from a known region of Africa, 43 percent came from Gambia and 44 percent from Sierra Leone or the Windward Coast.

There is much evidence that slaves were smuggled into Georgia illegally, especially from Congo and Angola, but also Ibos from the Bight of Biafra. At the time of Charles Lyell's visit to Georgia in the 1840s, one- fourth of the black population were said to have come directly from Africa. Even in 1858 the ship Wanderer landed 400 Africans from the Congo, mostly boys between 13 and 18, on Jekyll Island. Many of them and their descendants remained in the area, but 120 were shipped up the Savannah River to Augusta, Georgia. Some, interviewed in 1908, displayed their filed teeth and their houses built of straw, and recalled the crops grown and the slavery and polygamy practiced in Africa. African Americans on the Georgia coast in the 1930s recalled people brought from Africa with "Golla" in their names.

Slaves also entered Georgia by a semi- legal route, for Florida remained under the Spanish until ceded to the United States in 1819, and became a state only in 1845. It was thus possible for Africans, transported legally into Spanish Florida, to be brought over the border well after the slave trade officially ended in 1808. Memories of Africa, including recollections of the Moslem religion, survived in Georgia into the twentieth century. African retentions may have been strongest on the Georgia coast because of later reinforcements both directly and indirectly via Florida.

The slave trade brought not only people, but also parasites: deadly malignant tertian (falciparum) malaria, yellow fever, smallpox, and a host of worms. Blacks are relatively immune to the more common benign tertian (vivax) malaria. The mosquito- ridden Low Country allowed them to survive and work while whites fled to higher ground from May to October. Their isolation on the Sea Islands permitted development of their unique culture. But blacks suffered from white man’s illnesses, and some still do. Respiratory ailments, like pneumonia, hit them hardest, and whooping cough, diphtheria, and measles also took a deadly toll. Nutritional deficiencies compounded their health problems.

Members of a homogeneous group who came to an area first and in large numbers had an opportunity to establish their common speech and culture; those who followed in the same area, especially if they came in modest numbers over time, were compelled to adjust to the earlier ethnic group, as well as to whites. Although planters recognized different tribes, they blended them to make a homogeneous work force and obscure these distinctions.

Africans who arrived in Carolina and Georgia brought with them attributes of biology, culture, and language that reflected their homeland. What was retained into modern times was dependent not only on the genes, physique, customs, and speech of the areas of Africa from which they came, but also upon the numbers from different tribes, their time of arrival, whom they encountered along the way, and those they met on American shores. Moreover, the prevalence, strength, and utility of different attributes affected their survival. Beliefs, practices, skills, crafts, and speech of the Gullah, like the human body, are more than retention of those traits in Africa, but rather an adaptation over time that led through creolization to a distinctive society on the Sea Islands.

The black population grew astronomically. By 1740 it was almost 40,000 while the white population was 20,000, a ratio of two to one, fed both by natural increase and the ever- growing slave trade. By the 1770s half of the black population lived on big plantations where they vastly outnumbered whites, further promoting their isolation. In 1790, South Carolina's 107,094 slaves were 43 percent of its population, but Beaufort and Charleston Districts had 76 percent and some parishes reached 90 percent, as large plantations grew. From that year to the Civil War, the slave population of the state almost quadrupled to 402,400. The increase in the number of Africans, their concentration in rural area, the severity of slave codes, and the social alienation from whites produced an isolation and bond of brotherhood among the Gullah people. Yet miscegenation did occur, proven by history and by the census data on mulattoes.

The rise of "free persons of color," usually mulattoes, made an important contribution to Low Country society. In 1790 there were 1,801; by 1820 they had quadrupled to 6,826, most within the city of Charleston. They made a distinctive minority, talented craftsmen essential to the business of the community.

The Civil War brought change to the Sea Islands. After federal forces took over Beaufort and the neighboring islands, white planters fled and slaves came under the military. Newly emancipated blacks expressed an intense desire to remain in places of their former servitude; many purchased land to which they became emotionally and economically attached. Missionaries and teachers who flocked to the area to help, also reported to a wider world the music, folklore, customs, arts, crafts, beliefs, and language of the Gullah. Their efforts at education proved successful, helped to preserve their culture, and left a continuing legacy. The sea island people continued their isolation and way of life well into the twentieth century.

For all of its tragedy, the slave trade did bring with it benefits: useful plants and healing herbs that fed the economy and aided health.

Chapter 3 Trans Plants and the Economy

"Thank Him who placed us here beneath so kind a sky."
- Henry Timrod, *Ethnogenesis*, 1861.

Charleston's eminent nineteenth century poet said it well, but for those who were forced to toil in all kinds of weather, in summer's humid heat or winter's rainy cold, the sky was not always so kind. The story of agriculture and economics in coastal South Carolina is the story of black labor. Exploration of crops grown and their origin provides one further clue to the source of specific people from Africa, where they went in Carolina, and why. It also dramatically illustrates the adaptation of their work patterns to a different environment, a re- creation of something new that arose in America from the interaction of African and English culture, called creolization, a term borrowed from linguistics. Already acclimated to the heat, humidity, and luxuriant vegetation of subtropical Carolina, blacks were better equipped than whites to face the rigors of the frontier. They used their talents well in fields and streams; one man with gun and net could bring in as much food as five families could eat.

From earliest days one natural product was available in abundance to convert into profits, the forest itself. Wood was used for the construction of houses, the building of ships, and the making of barrel staves. The needs of the British navy were also fulfilled in naval stores derived from the plentiful pine trees: tar, pitch, resin, and turpentine. Blacks in these operations utilized what they had learned in their homeland. With the clearing of the forests more land was available for another major industry, cattle raising. The mild climate, combined with abundant foliage, caused the multiplication of the animals at a remarkable rate. Soon the leather from cowhides supplemented the skins from deer and other wild animals as valuable exports from the young colony.

Here especially the skills of blacks proved vital to the economy, for they were employed in the herding of live stock. Many Africans, especially the Fulani from Gambia, had had experience in tending cattle in their homeland. The term "cow- boy" first came to be used in coastal Carolina at the beginning of the eighteenth century for one who tends cows, just as "house- boy" was used for one who keeps the house. The Africans taught the Englishmen open grazing in contrast to their custom of raising small herds confined to small pastures, although Spanish to the south also influenced the practices of the Carolina settlers.

People from specific areas of Africa were preferred for particular occupations, often on the basis of their native skills. Thus, Wolofs and other Senegambians were favored as house servants, along with Yoruba and Dahomeans. Bambara and Malinke from the western bulge and Pawpaws and Coramantees from the Gold Coast area were sought as artisans. Senegambians, thought to have Arabic admixture, were valued as blacksmiths, skilled in the working of both metal and wood. Mande people worked as rowers, transporting supplies and crops along the waterways of Carolina as they had done for ages along the rivers of Senegal and Gambia. These coastal West Africans also imported the art of netcasting which became an established tradition in the tidal shallows of Carolina, and the women served as cooks, maids, and nurses in the white man's home. The Bantu- speaking Angolans, along with the Ibo and related people of Calabar, were more often employed as field hands. Three crops that thrived in the sandy soil of the Low Country required ever more African laborers and enriched their white masters.

Riches from Rice

The crop that became the crown jewel in the crown colony of South Carolina and dominated its economy into the mid- nineteenth century is a legendary pearly white grain barely a quarter of an inch long – rice.

When Captain John Thurber brought seed to Dr. Henry Woodward on a ship from Madagascar about 1685, Carolina Gold Rice, a new grain adaptable to wet cultivation, began. By 1700 more rice was produced in the colony than there were ships to transport it. Later, Carolina White Rice, introduced by Robert Rowan, was even more popular. The days of its greatest economic importance in Charleston's foreign trade lay before the Revolution, but it continued to be an important export crop down to the Civil War. "Charleston's colonial merchants grew as fat on rice profits as the swarms of bobolinks, known as rice birds, fattened themselves during the annual visits to the South Carolina rice fields on the eve of the fall harvest," according to Thomas Tobias.

In 1850, 257 plantations along ten rivers of the state produced an astounding 159,930,613 pounds or nearly 80,000 tons of rice. At its peak 150,000 acres of swamp and tidal marshes were under cultivation. In 1860, nine of the fourteen slaveholders in the United States owning more than 500 slaves were rice planters.

In the early years of the colony, rice was grown on inland swamps, a hazardous procedure because the valuable crop could be lost by either too much water or too little. Then planters learned to utilize the timbered swamps that bordered fresh- water tidal rivers such as the Waccamaw, Pee Dee, Santee, Cooper, Edisto, and Combahee, where tides were utilized in the cultivation of the grain. During the first half of the eighteenth century, three to four acres of rice per hand were produced by the older method; after tidal culture became the norm one man could handle up to seven acres.

Duncan Clinch Heyward, who grew rice himself along the Combahee River just as his great grandfather had done, wrote of the cultivation of the grain in *Seed from Madagascar*. He speculated that the manner of cultivation came from China, based on pictures he had seen of rice production there: the plowing of the fields with black water buffalo, the sowing of seed broadcast on the water, and the transplanting of rice by hand in the fields.

Ironically these very Chinese techniques were not those used in Carolina. David Doar, the last of four generations to plant rice along the Santee, marveled at the intricacies of the elaborate irrigation system necessary for the production of the crop - - from the white man's traditional point of view.

"As one views this vast hydraulic work, he is amazed to learn that all of this was accomplished in the face of seemingly insuperable difficulties by every- day planters who had as tools only the axe, the spade, and the hoe, in the hands of intractable Negro [*sic*] men and women, but lately brought from the jungles of Africa."

Yet rice growing in coastal Carolina is a dramatic case of African influence in America only recently appreciated. Many slaves, especially those from Senegal and the coast to the south of it, evidently knew more about planting this important food crop than their masters did. Blacks from those regions were deliberately brought to Carolina because of their experience and skill in these techniques. West Africans were actually selling rice to traders by the fifteenth century; Portuguese noted its cultivation in Senegambia by 1453 and purchased it by 1480. The grain was sold to slave traders in the seventeenth century, and was well known in the eighteenth.

As early as 1700 ships from Carolina were in the Gambia River where rice was grown along the river banks. Many advertisements in the Charles Town newspaper attest to the demand for slaves from rice- growing regions of Africa, and the "Rice Coast," a portion of the Windward Coast roughly equal to Liberia, is mentioned repeatedly. The *South Carolina Gazette* for May 30, 1785, advertised 152 slaves from Gambia to be sold on June 7: "The Negroes from this part of the coast of Africa are well acquainted with the cultivation of rice and are naturally industrious." An ad of August 25 of that same year for slaves from the Windward and Gold Coasts stresses the point that they are accustomed to the planting of both rice and corn.

Hardly by chance 61 percent of the slaves brought into Charleston between 1749 and 1787 were from rich rice- growing areas of Africa: Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the Windward Coast. (See Table “6.”) As many of these people had been slaves in their native land, they were often prepared both in attitude and in training for rice cultivation along the Carolina coast. "Carolinians may well have gone to Gambia as students and brought back Africans as teachers."

The history of rice binds together Asia, Africa, and America. *Oryza glaberrima*, with erect, compact flower clusters and red grains, was grown as early as 1500 B. C. along the Casamance River in Senegambia and the inland delta where the Niger River flows northeast toward Timbuktu. Much later, when the more adaptable Asian species, *O. sativa*, with leaning clusters and white grains and greater yield, was introduced into the western Sudan, it tended to replace the earlier species as well as hybridize with it, and variants of it are widely grown throughout western Africa even today.

Such tribes as the Bambara, Fula, Malinke, and Songhai had long experience in growing this rich grain along the Niger River, while others, such as the Serer, Mende, Temne, Kissi, Papel, and Baga utilized their own special techniques of rice production from Senegal to the Ivory Coast. From Cape Verde to Sierra Leone the extraordinary topography, numerous silt- laden rivers, high tides that periodically covered the terrain, and mangrove roots that hold the alluvium produce the richest soil in West Africa, ideally suited for rice production. Knowledge of terrains and tides, sluice gates and soil types, rivers and rice, the slaves from West Africa brought to the fields of South Carolina. April brought the sowing when slaves dropped the rice seed into trenches and covered them by the foot. Then sluice gates, opened at high tide, flooded the fields until the seeds sprouted. After draining and hoeing, came the "long water" that submerged the fields for three weeks to destroy insects and grass, followed by another three weeks of the excruciating work of hoeing. Toward mid July the harvest flood began when heavy heads of ripening rice were supported by water. September brought final draining, harvesting with rice hooks, drying, tying in sheaves, stacking, and the difficult task of flailing off the heads of the grain, then winnowing to separate the grain from the chaff by fanning in the wind.

When a New World slave plants rice by pressing a hole with his heel and covering the seeds with his foot, his motion is just like that found in parts of West Africa. When blacks sow rice with a gourd or hoe in unison to work songs, the cultivation and the singing too are echoes of traits learned long ago from African ancestors. The term "trunk" for a sluice gate is from West African usage, where a hollow log plugged at one end acts as a valve. Even the mortar and pestle so efficient for removing husks from rice grains are derived from similar instruments of their homeland. Finally, when threshed grain is fanned in the wind, those wide, flat winnowing baskets used are like the ones known for centuries in Africa. In rice production blacks adapted their basic skills and work patterns to a different labor system, a process of cultural creolization. Although the task system treated them as individuals, the strong helped the weak as they worked in groups, much as they had done in their homeland.

To the Charlestonian it is not a meal without rice. In a ritual practiced in Sierra Leone and in the Sea Islands, one first picks out any dirt or dark grains, and then washes the rice vigorously between the hands. The method of cooking it in South Carolina, described as early as 1756 by Eliza Lucas Pinckney, producing separate fluffy grains, is derived from Africa in contrast to the way in China. An imaginative use of spices by slave cooks was also in part inherited from Africa, and influenced whites.

Many blacks who live today where rice once held sway are descended from those who prepared the soil and grew and cooked the glistening grain beside the rolling tides of their West African homeland ages before.

A Dyeing Art: Indigo

The development of the dye indigo in South Carolina is, quite literally, a colorful story. Color, intimately woven into the fabric of our lives, has always fascinated mankind. Dyes predate history, add variety to clothes and homes, and signal social status, like the purple long known as the color of royalty.

Indigo, derived from a species of *Indigofera*, has been used for more than 4000 years. The shrubby legume, with pinnate leaves and dull reddish purple flowers, was known to the ancients of Asia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. While *I. tinctoria*, the best known species, a native of India, has been found in Senegal, *I. arrecta* is the more common variety indigenous to Africa.

Before European contact indigo was known to the Kanuri dyers of the Cameroun who carried it from Bornu to the region of Lake Chad. Fulani were also responsible for its spread in West Africa. An official at Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast reported in 1766 that, "There is a Sort of Indigo grows wild here that the Natives make use of and is of a very lasting dye."

Lieutenant- Colonel George Lucas, stationed in Antigua, brought his sick wife to Charles Town for her health in 1738. When he returned to the West Indies, he put his 16- year- old daughter Eliza in charge of his plantation on the Wappoo, a salt creek connecting the Ashley with the Stono River. Eliza was an unusually bright, energetic, strong- minded, young lady who began immediately experimenting with crops that would grow best in the sandy, fertile soil of coastal Carolina. Arising at five each morning, she found time not only for agriculture but also for extensive reading, music, needlework, and writing, including those letters that record her work and thoughts.

By July, 1739, she mentioned in a letter to her father "the pains I had taken to bring Indigo, Ginger, Cotton, and Lucerne (an alfalfa) and Casada (cassava?) to perfection, and had greater hopes from the Indigo – if I could have the seed earlier the next year from the West India's – than any of ye rest of ye things I had tryd."

The actual process of making dye from the leaves of the plants is tricky and requires patient work. The leaves must be soaked in water until they ferment, froth, and give up their coloring matter, a process that can take several days, when the head man or "Indigo Maker" must watch day and night. The

liquid is then drained off into a second vat clear of leaves where it is beaten with paddles until it begins to thicken. After it is led into a third vat and allowed to settle, the sediment is formed into lumps or cakes and dried. Dissatisfied with the product turned out by a white overseer, Eliza soon found where the fault lay and reported greater success when Governor Lucas sent her a black man from one of the French islands.

Eliza devoted virtually the whole crop of indigo of 1744 to making seed which she gave to planters. By 1747 enough indigo was produced to export it for sale to England. Aided by a bounty paid by the British to exclude the competing French, planters could double their capital every three to four years.

Indigo flourished as one major staple of the colony for some thirty years. Combined with walnut, it was the chief plant for dyeing cloth. Just before the American Revolution the annual export was an incredible 1,107,660 pounds. The loss of the British bounty after the Revolution, the cheaper labor in the Indies, and the easier cultivation of cotton led to its demise by the end of the century. While there is no proof that Africans were deliberately imported for their knowledge of indigo, many were clearly experienced in the production and use of the dye in their homeland.

How rice and indigo culture complemented each other and compounded the labor of the black worker is indicated by this comment by Governor Glen in 1761. "But I cannot leave this subject without observing how conveniently and profitable, as to the charge of Labour, both Indigo and Rice may be managed by the same Persons, for the Labour attending Indigo being over in the Summer Months, those who were employed in it may afterwards manufacture Rice in the ensuing Part of the Year, when it becomes most laborious; and after doing all this, they will have some Time to spare for sawing Lumber and making Hogsheads, and other Staves to supply the Sugar Colonies."

The productivity of the colony and the richness and diversity of its goods is illustrated by the dozen most lucrative commodities exported from the Port of Charles Town from November, 1747, to November, 1748 (see table “12”). Only the skin of the ubiquitous deer could compete with rice and indigo in worth. Many other items of field and forest were also exported, including "Pease," Oranges, Butter, a little silk, and even cotton that would in time dominate the economy of the whole South.

Magic Thread: Cotton

That ball of shiny white fiber that supplies three- fourths of the clothing of the world has been known for millennia. The domestication of Old World tree cotton (*Gossypium arboreum*) probably began in East Africa before 2500 B. C. Shrub cotton (*G. herbaceum*) was first cultivated in West Africa; textiles made from it were woven there by the end of the first millennium A. D. Kano in Nigeria has been a cotton market since the ninth century, and cotton cloth was brought from the Guinea coast to England in the sixteenth century.

Of the two best known commercial species of modern times, Upland cotton (G. *hirsutum*), first domesticated in Mesoamerica, has short, coarse fibers that cling to its green seeds so that hand separation is impractical. Sea- island cotton (*G. barbadense*), first cultivated in South America, has long, thin, lustrous, silky fibers, readily separated from its black seeds, that make the finest fabrics. Both species, disseminated by the Spanish into Spain and by the Portuguese into Africa, soon replaced Old World cotton. The sea islands of Carolina and Georgia, with 280 frost- free days a year, has the ideal sandy soil, temperature, rainfall, and labor necessary for the growth of long- staple cotton, so much in demand.

Just exactly when and how an annual long- staple cotton, able to grow on long summer days, came to the Sea Islands is open to debate. In the most appealing account, Frank Levett in Georgia received bags of cotton seeds from Pernambuco, Brazil, in 1786. Desiring the bags more than the seeds, he dumped them out on a dunghill, found plants growing there the following spring, continued their cultivation, and was pleased to find instant popularity of the product in London. Yet Alexander Bisset

is said to have grown the first crop of long- staple cotton on a sea island of Georgia from seed from Bahama as early as 1778. The first attempt to grow the product in South Carolina was made on Burden's Island in 1788; the first successful crop was grown by William Elliott on Hilton Head in 1790.

Cotton cultivation was labor intensive, requiring back- breaking work year around. A visitor to Cannon's Point plantation on St. Simons Island, Georgia, in 1828 described the process. In January and February, workers had to manure the fields; in March, they planted the seed. After the clusters of plants sprouted, the slaves thinned them with hoes, and in the hot summer months they weeded the surviving plants six to eight times. After "topping" the cotton to limit the upward growth in August, slaves began picking the ripe bolls through October, often 100 pounds a day. Beginning in November and continuing into the next year, the seeds were removed from the lint by hand; after picking out trash, the laborers hand packed the cotton lint into bags.

The demand for sea- island cotton is illustrated by the record of its export from South Carolina in the last decade of the eighteenth century. In 1790, 9,840 pounds were sent forth from the newly created state; by 1801, the export rose to 8,301,907 pounds. It continued to be a powerful economic force for many years, reaching its height of production in 1819. As the value of indigo declined, sea- island cotton took its place alongside rice as a major crop for export. Into the twentieth century, cotton factors (including this writer's paternal grandfather and great grandfather) were busy shipping the valuable cargo to northern states and to England from the wharves of Charleston, Beaufort, and Savannah.

Despite its fine qualities, long- staple cotton declined in production as the short staple variety increased. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 made the upland plant profitable almost anywhere. Sea- island required more labor, cost twice as much, and was more vulnerable to the ravages of the boll weevil. By the 1860s one hundred times as much upland as sea- island cotton was produced throughout the country.

"King Cotton" came to dominate the economy and the politics of the whole south as black labor picked white bolls from the Atlantic shore to the vast and rich soil of Texas. While there is no proof that native Africans were deliberately imported for their knowledge of cotton growing, both upland and sea- island species were grown in Africa during the slave trade. Economic pressure drove blacks of the Low Country to labor to produce plants their ancestors had known and enjoyed in their homeland.

Under the task system on the Sea Islands each slave was given a specific assignment, such as picking three acres of cotton a day. During the peak of a harvest season the "work day" could last into the night, but when the task was light one had free time in the afternoon to hunt, fish, or garden. This time off, rather than the work day alone, shaped and preserved the culture of the Gullah- speaking people.

While rice, indigo, and sea- island cotton were the big three of the economy of coastal South Carolina for more than a century, they do not exhaust the long list of crops cultivated by black labor, some of them imported from Africa. Ships were provisioned on both sides of the Atlantic; cultigens from each side, brought to the other, were often deliberately grown there. African plants enriched the soil of Carolina as bondsmen provided a botanical bond between two continents.

Trans Plants as Food

Africa is home to many life- sustaining crops, including nine cereals, half a dozen root crops, five oil- producing plants, a dozen forage crops, a dozen vegetables, three fruits and nuts, coffee, sesame, and the ancient and ubiquitous bottle gourd or calabash useful as a drinking cup, float for fishnet, or sound box for music. West Africa alone is the locus of origin of cereals such as Guinea millet, *fonio*, African rice, pearl millet, and sorghum (Guinea corn); cowpeas; okra; some species of yam; oil palm, and the akee apple, as well as some varieties of Old World cotton.

Valuable plants were also imported into Africa from other continents. When Spanish and Portuguese galleons sailed between the Old World and the New, they carried more than people and treasure; they engaged in the greatest transport of plants and animals the globe has ever known.

Among nineteen species from Central and South America transplanted to Africa, none is more important for feeding humanity and has a more colorful history than corn or maize (*Zea mays*). Known from Mexico by 5000 B. C., it extended from Canada to southern Argentina at the time of European contact with the Americas. As colonists learned from the Indians how to cultivate this major food crop, it became the bridge by which European civilization gained a foothold in the New World. Brought by the Portuguese and Dutch from Guiana and Brazil, it was known on the coast of West Africa perhaps as early as 1502 and clearly by 1525. Names for maize in local languages correlate with its entrance through trading centers like Port Harcourt in Nigeria. By the seventeenth century, it was an important foodstuff from Liberia to the Niger Delta, especially on the Gold Coast and Dahomey; established as a valuable crop in the Congo Basin and Angola; and significant for provisioning slave ships. Tobacco, peanuts, cacao, and beans, first grown in Latin America, also spread to Africa. Africans brought to South Carolina were thus familiar with cultivation of many useful crops.

Descriptions and illustrations of naturalists of the time, such as Catesby (1771), Barton (1798), and Elliott (1821), identify species known to African Americans. Of at least nineteen plants introduced by Africans into the Americas, most flourished in the West Indies, including some varieties of yams, the akee apple, the Angola or pigeon pea, broad beans, maroon cucumber, senna, bichy nut, and oil palm. At least six more were also brought into Carolina.

Best known from West Africa is that tasty mucilaginous vegetable, okra or gumbo (*Abelmoschus esculentus*). First domesticated in tropical Africa, it spread widely along the Guinea coast and into the Cameroons by the time of the slave trade and was brought to the Americas in the 1600s. Words for it are found in many African languages. Since "okra" is from *nkruman* in the language of the Gold Coast and "gumbo" is from *tshingombo* in Bantu languages, the popularity of this plant is evident. Benne seed, from a word in Bambara and Wolof, is also called sesame (*Sesamum indicum*). Probably first domesticated in East Africa, it was widespread on the continent at the time of the slave trade as a valuable source of oil. In 1730 Thomas Lowndes of South Carolina sent samples of oil made from "sesamum" to the Lords of the Treasury. Best known today on cookies or in candies, it was brought with blacks to Carolina where it was also used in soups and puddings.

The black- eyed or cow pea (*Vigna unguiculata*) is an import from West and Central Africa that found its way to the West Indies and the Low Country. First domesticated at the margin of the forest and savannah in tropical West Africa, its seeds are known from Kintampo in central Ghana as early as 1800 B. C. and at Zimbabwe in southeast Africa by 1000 A. D.; it flourishes especially in Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria today, and names for it are also found in many African languages. Introduced into the New World tropics by the Spanish no later than the seventeenth century to supply towns and missions, it was known in the southern United States by the early eighteenth century.

The circular route of the peanut (*Arachis hypogaea*) is unique. Taken from Brazil to Africa around 1500 by the Portuguese, it established a secondary center in the Congo; was cultivated in Senegambia in the 1560s, and was widespread in West Africa by 1600. Fed to slaves on ships to Virginia, peanuts spread to South Carolina. Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*) originally cultivated in India, was brought by Arabs into Spain and by Persians into Africa before the arrival of Europeans. Widespread from Senegal to Cameroun, it is known not only as a food but also as a medicine and as a symbol of fertility.

Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*), a native of the dry savannah of east and south Africa, was grown in the Nile valley by 2000 B. C. Brought by Spanish colonists to Florida in 1576, it was enthusiastically accepted by the Indians who passed seeds from tribe to tribe like smoke signals; by 1600 it was known

all the way to the Pueblos of the southwest. Abundant in the British colonies by 1650, it was grown in Carolina by 1671.

Guinea corn or sorghum, first domesticated in the Central Sudan and distributed to West Africa probably before 1000 B. C., was cultivated in South Carolina by blacks at one time, according to the eighteenth century botanist Catesby: "*Milium indicum*, bunched guinea corn...But little of this grain is propagated, and that chiefly by the Negroes, who make bread of it, and boil it in like manner of furmety. Its chief use is for feeding fowls, for which the smallness of the grain adapts it... *Panicum indicum*, spiked Indian corn, smaller grains than the precedent, used for feeding fowl. These two grains are rarely seen but in plantations of Negroes who brought it from Guinea, their native country."

The fate of yams, so important in a religious festival on the Guinea coast, is a special problem. Several species, including *Dioscorea alata*, the winged or bacara yam from Asia, as well as native African yams, were introduced into the West Indies through the provisioning of ships. But at least one kind, a white yam, *D. rotundata*, also grew on the mainland colony; Catesby reported that "Carolina is the farthest North I have seen them grow and more for curiosity than advantage ...few think them worth propagating."

Africans brought to South Carolina were thus familiar with the cultivation of at least fifteen crops, almost half of which had been domesticated in their homeland (see table "13"). To pinpoint one place of origin in Africa of plants imported with the slave trade into Charleston is virtually impossible, for they grew over too wide a territory. The evidence points to a major role of West Africa from Gambia through Nigeria, but does not exclude some influence from Central Africa as well. These plants also illustrate the role of the West Indies in connecting Africa to the Sea Islands.

More significant than any particular plants actually brought from Africa into the colony is the combination of the natives' familiarity with techniques of cultivation of similar vegetation in the Old World and the opportunity to try them on plants in the New. Yes, most of their labor was forced, directed toward producing for the master. But in the garden, permitted by the task system, and in exploration of field and forest, the experience and the innovation of African Americans made a contribution to horticulture and agriculture. Again, they adapted and modified Old World crops and techniques in a process of creolization, and spread valuable knowledge to whites as well. Nowhere did the heritage of Africa and the creativity of its people in their new environment show more than in their use of plants in treating their ailments.

Healing Herbs

Do you have a cold and cough with congestion and fever? Pick the annual herb "life everlasting," boil its leaves, stem, and yellow flowers, add another plant like pine tops or mullein or sea myrtle, to make one of the most popular cold remedies in South Carolina. Some say it will also relieve cramps, diseases of the bowels, and pulmonary complaints, and promote general well being. The dried plant is smoked for asthma, the leaves and flowers are chewed for quinsy, the crumbled leaves relieve toothache, and a bath of it eases foot pains. Some people today buy it in the City Market in Charleston and take it to friends in New York.

Life everlasting (*Gnaphalium polycephalum)* is only one of about 100 plants used by the citizens of the Low Country for centuries for healing aches and pains, the use of many of them derived from ancient traditions of the Old World. Left to themselves to cope with illness, blacks of Tidewater Carolina of necessity combined the lore of Africa with the plants of their new habitat, often drawing upon the craft of the Indians as well. The cures they devised were similar to medicines of white settlers of the times, but usually with this difference: the blacks, like the Native Americans, generally made decoctions from one, or at most two, living plants, while the whites relied more on a mixture of chemical substances derived from five or six plants. Yet there was cross fertilization; both blacks and

whites built upon the experience of the Indian. The popular use of wild black cherry for coughs by European Americans and blackberry for diarrhea among African Americans are well known examples of such borrowing.

The cause of illness was perceived by the blacks of the Sea Islands as natural, occult due to conjuring, or spiritual due to one's sins. The remedy must fit the cause, but it was not always easy to distinguish among them. The conjuror's hex could produce physical ailments and behavioral problems, while the wages of sin and the power of the devil could best be mitigated by the preacher. Fortunately the root doctor was the herbalist as well and assisted in alleviating both natural and occult disease. He knew what plant to gather, when and where, what part to use, and how to prepare the concoction. No wonder he wielded great influence among the sea islanders, for his powers generated dependency and fear. Many women also learned the art of collecting medicinal plants and preparing cures from them, and passed on their skill to their own daughters as well as to whites.

Most drugs were plant products, and the botanist was also pharmacist. As early as 1806 John Shecut published in *Charleston Flora Carolinaensis* with the "medical virtues" as well as full descriptions and illustrations of many species of the state. In 1847 Dr. Francis Peyre Porcher in his *Resources of the Southern Fields and Forests* recorded some 600 species of botanical resources available for healing in the South (1863), and in 1869 he enlarged his findings. Two recent botanists, Faith Mitchell and Julia Morton, drawing upon such early volumes as well as their own first-hand observations and interviews, produced books on the plant remedies still in use on the Sea Islands.

Several different herbs were employed to combat one illness and many different complaints were treated with the same plant. Tannin-rich astringents, like the leaves of sweet gum, myrtle and blackberry, were invaluable in treating the all-too-common profuse diarrhea and dysentery; bitterness was prized in searching for a cure for ever-present malaria. More than a dozen plants were used to treat colds, a dozen more for fever; a half dozen were applied to sores and as many again were taken as tonics, considered especially beneficial when whiskey was added. Galax was recommended for high blood pressure; sweet gum relieved stomach pains; kidney weed was a diuretic; and swamp grass made an excellent poultice.

As snakebite was common, several plants were recommended as an antidote including the leaves of American aloe and the root bark of the Angelica tree, both known to blacks as "rattlesnake master." In the 1700s a slave named Caesar was given his freedom and 100 pounds per annum for life by the General Assembly as a reward for discovering a cure for those who were bitten by a rattlesnake or who had swallowed poison. This knowledge was a two-edged sword, for blacks could use plant poison against their masters, and some did.

No plant was so popular as sassafras whose roots were used to make tea as a tonic. Whites adopted it for treating rheumatism and high blood pressure; blacks said that a tea from white sassafras roots would cure blindness. Early in American history it was exported to England for colic, venereal disease, and general pain. Combined with mare's milk, it was used as an eye wash.

Both male and female problems are said to be helped by herbs. Horse nettle (*Solanum carolinense*) has long had a great reputation as an aphrodisiac; both stinging nettle (*Cnidoscolus stimulosus*) and ironweed (*Sida rhombifolia*) give a man "courage," *i.e.*, sexual potency. Cotton root was the most widely used abortifacient among slave women, and many other parts of the plant were used as medicines.

A surprising number of food plants, especially fruits, also yielded products used to treat disease. Fig, peach, pomegranate, persimmon, along with basil, okra, and pumpkin, found their way into the pharmacological lore of the Sea Islands. No line can be drawn between folk medicine and the scientific medicine of the time; of fifty species listed by Mitchell, a dozen were in the *US*

Pharmacopeia or *National Formulary* or both from 1820 into the present century, including mint, blackberry, wild black cherry, elderberry, galax, jimson weed, pine tar, poker root, and sassafras.

Relating medicinal plants of South Carolina to those of Africa is difficult, as similar but not identical species are often found, and some were used by Indians long before the arrival of blacks. Medicine and religion are so intertwined that it is hard to draw a line between plants with a sound scientific basis for their action, and those that drive out an evil spirit. Of the vast number of herbs and shrubs long tried in Africa for healing, hundreds have a proven action, and some have found their way into western medicine.

By trial and error African natives learned which plants were useful for a wide range of ailments from cramps and coughs to wounds and worms. Medicine men applied emollients, purgatives, antihelmintics, diuretics, anodynes, sedatives, and narcotics; they also used a wide range of poisons for deadly arrow tips and for trial by ordeal. African willow (*Salix capensis*), a source of salicylic acid, is used throughout the continent to treat rheumatism. The scientific name of the tree musenna, *Albizia antihelmintica*, suggests its efficacy in treating tapeworms. Some plants are deliberately cultivated for their medicinal use, like sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*) as a topical ointment, the castor bean (*Ricinus communis*) as a purgative, and the chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*) as a vermifuge. Many are actually major exports like gum arabic (*Acacia* sp.) and aloes, the two most important drug plants in Africa.

The fig (*Ficus carica*) is a classic example of a plant used in Africa as both food and medicine. The fruit serves as a cathartic and a dressing for skin lesions, the leaves are used for indigestion, and the tannin-rich bark relieves diarrhea and expels worms. Some well-known spices also have medicinal properties, like Kola as a tonic, Guinea cloves for dysentery, Cayenne pepper as a carminative, and Grains of Paradise as a vermifuge.

Catalogues of medicinal plants of Africa, with focus on the Guinea Coast, along with their pharmacology, provide the basis of comparison with those of the Low Country. At least fourteen plants, said to have some healing properties, are in use in South Carolina and in West Africa. Although most of the items are employed to treat more than one condition, the same plant is often used in the same way on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, wormseed and the chinaberry tree are taken as a vermifuge, especially against *Necator americanus* or hookworm. The crushed flowers of okra are applied to snakebites, and cotton is used for abortion or uterine contraction in the Old World and in the New. Nightshade, taken for fever in the Low Country and in Africa, has known antibacterial action. Jimson weed, used as a vermifuge, cold medicine, and salve in Carolina, is taken as a narcotic in West Africa; it spurs Fulani youth on to bold deeds of conquest and ordeal. Over a century ago Porcher recognized its narcotic and antispasmotic effects and reported "maniacs frequently restored to perfect saneness of mind, which they never afterward lost, by the continuous use of the extract."

Basil, taken for colds and other ailments, and pomegranate, used to stop diarrhea, in South Carolina, are best known as antihelmintics in West Africa; pumpkin, taken for dropsy as a diuretic, is also used to treat worms there. Porcher says of sedge: "In Guinea this is considered one of the remedies for worms;" but he mentions no application of the plant in his own state. The frequency of antihelmintics and vermifuges underscores the abundance of worms on both sides of the Atlantic, both culprit and cure the offspring of the slave trade.

More important than the same species in linking Africa to the Sea Islands is the similar way in which these plants are regarded in the art of healing, and the beliefs surrounding them. The traditional and ancient Doctrine of Signatures holds that nature provides a plant remedy for every disease and indicates an obvious sign for its use. The liver-shaped leaves of Hepatica should be valuable in treating disease of the liver; a plant with heart-shaped leaves should be useful in treating cardiac problems. Plants with big fruits aid fertilization, plants with latex increase milk production, and those whose stems have swollen joints and bend like a knee are good for sprained knees. In South Carolina

the spots on the leaves of the trumpet root (*Sarracenia minor*) are regarded as a sign that the plant is a good remedy for skin troubles.

Medicinal plants with common use on both sides of the Atlantic; along with that deep- seated and long- continued habit of picking certain herbs to make a concoction when accident and illness strike, make the connection between Africa and Carolina undeniable. The many ailments and the limited medical treatment available made such therapy a necessity. Modified in an ongoing process of adaptation, home remedies made from plants continued among the Gullah people because of both their practical and psychological value.

The continuity, re- creation, and adaptation of Africans to the Low Country are nowhere more vividly expressed than in their speech. The Gullah language reveals more about their specific origins than any trait considered thus far. The people must be heard in their own words for both the source of their speech and its creolization over time to be fully appreciated.

Chapter 4 The Gullah Language

"Uh yeddy um but uh ain sheum."

An outsider would be understandably bewildered if he heard a native of the Sea Islands say this- - and surprised to learn that it meant "I have heard of him but I haven't seen him." Many words and phrases equally obscure to the visitor have been the everyday speech of the black people of the region as long as anyone can remember. It is not all one- sided; a coastal black on hearing the English of the northern visitor said: "Dey use dem mout' so funny."

Isolated since the early eighteenth century, slaves and their descendants developed their own language marked as much by its rhythm, tempo, and stress as by its vocabulary and grammar. The uninflected verb shows no tense; the pronouns show no gender; and reduplication of words intensifies meaning and expresses magnitude and excitement. The word “Gullah” is probably derived from Angola, although some cite the Gola tribe of Liberia.

The earliest students considered it a survival of the simplified English in which white owners addressed their black servants, and almost nothing African remained. The discovery of the extent of the African heritage in Gullah had to await the work of a scholar of unique attributes - - training, knowledge, patience, and pigmentation.

Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect

Lorenzo Dow Turner was a black linguist whose skin color gave him entree to the Gullah speakers on the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia. For several years, beginning in 1932, he lived among them, listening, recording, and writing their speech in the phonetic alphabet, and then comparing it with that of the people of West Africa, a study spanning fifteen years in all. In addition to his own knowledge, dictionaries, and grammars, he relied upon twenty- seven informants who knew together at least sixteen African languages.

The result of his labor, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), changed thinking not only about the speech of that coastal people but also about the linguistic heritage of African Americans in general. He listed 3595 personal names with their similarities to terms in African languages, 251 other words used in conversation, and some 92 expressions heard only in stories, songs, and prayers. He described the syntax, morphological features, word formation, sounds, and intonations that characterize Gullah.

Finally Gullah texts were printed both in phonetics and in the English equivalent. White scholars had evidently failed to recognize African antecedents in Gullah partly because the vast majority of

Turner's words are personal names used only in the privacy of the family and partly because they knew little or nothing of African languages. (To avoid the complex symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet that Turner uses, a rough equivalent in the English alphabet is substituted in the subsequent discussion.)

To follow Turner's Africanisms it is necessary to turn back to the languages of Africa. Of thirty- two languages of West and Central Africa classified by Greenberg and by Guthrie (see table “15”), all except five are considered by Turner as influencing Gullah; at least seventeen are spoken by more than one million people today. All except Songhai in Mali, Djerma in Niger, and Hausa in northern Nigeria are in the great Niger- Congo group.

What's in a Name?

African languages come alive in the Sea Islands in names and naming practices. Most Gullah- speaking people have two kinds of given name; one used in school and among strangers is English, the other is the basket name or nickname, "nearly always a word of African origin... In many instances both the given- name and surname are African words.” To the African the power to name is the power to control. Even when the Gullah name is English it follows African naming practices, like those of the Twi, Dahomeans, Mandingo, Yoruba, Ibo, tribes of northern Nigeria, and the Ovimbundu of Angola.

Almost universally in Africa a child has at least two given names, bestowed by an intriguing array of circumstances. Widespread is the practice of naming the baby for the day of the week; the month, or season of its birth, birth order, or one of a pair of twins. Conditions at birth such as feet foremost, head presentation, born of a prolonged pregnancy, or with the cord or caul about the neck, are well known sources of names among the Dahomeans especially. The first child born after twins, or after one with a caul, combines two concepts in one name.

In addition to individual names, the Mandingo, among others, stress clan names, the descendants of a real or mythical ancestor, such as a crocodile. Animals, plants, or places inspire a cognomen, especially among the Twi and tribes of northern Nigeria. Among several groups a new, second name is given upon a special occasion. Among the Mandingo, the mother gives each child at birth a temporary name determined by its sex and birth order, which a few days later can be replaced by another. This True Name often reflects an attribute of a relative, the name of a divinity, the day of the week, or a circumstance of birth, such as bili, meaning curvature, because the baby's body was bent double. Other special names may be added to this later in life. The Moslem Mandingo often use names from the Koran, a son of the Prophet or of a Caliph, or from the Bible, such as the Arabic for Abraham or Isaac.

The Yoruba frequently give an appellation at birth indicating the circumstances, such as along a wayside or during a festival or with extra digits. In addition the child is given a "christening" name, often with religious or emotional connotation, such as "Ogun (a god) consoles me with this," or "Joy enters our house." The first name given is often considered secret lest some supernatural power knowing it could harm the child. Among the Hausa this name is whispered into the ear of the new-born; only a second name is in daily use.

To read the Gullah personal names listed by Turner is a fascinating entree into the secret life of the sea island black people as well as a convincing argument for African affinity. For each of them are "West African words that are phonetically identical with or strikingly similar to them [with] several meanings the words have in a number of West African languages."

Examples from nineteen African languages in a dozen categories illustrate the colorful and creative usage of words in naming children. Time, date, or season is expressed in many of these Gullah names in the twentieth century as it was in the eighteenth. *Aba* (Fante) indicates a girl born on Thursday, *ajowa* (Ewe) one born on Monday. *Bimbi* (Fula) means early morning, *marece* (Hausa) the late

afternoon, and *klema* (Mandingo) the hot season. *Ali* (Mandingo) is a name given the fifth male child, and *ata* (Twi) is the male of twins. *Olugbodi* (Yoruba) is bestowed upon a child born with extra digits.

Appearance is reflected in many of these basket names. In Yoruba, *adu* refers to one who is very black, *arupe* to dwarf, and *pele* to tribal marks on the face. *Dafa* for fat literally means mouth full in Vai. The body is a common source of names along the coast. *Juso* (Mandinka) is similar to the word for liver; *sisi* (Twi), the lower part of the back; *kowa* (Mende), a large stomach; and *ebeni* (Kongo), the breast. Sex is reflected here as well. In Kongo, *lonzo* means inordinate sexual desire; *yonga,* to copulate; and *wilama*, to be pregnant.

Various diseases are represented in this lexicon. *Kurang* (Mandinka) means to be ill, *kungo* (Bambara) hysteria, *pitsi* (Ewe) leprosy, and *bombo* (Mende) smallpox. Perhaps such illnesses could be cured by *ingkishi* (Kongo), a charm or medicine, or by *wanga* (Umbundu), witchcraft.

As in Africa, animals and plants are represented. *Esa* (Umbundu) is corn and *jaba* (Bambara) onion; *begbe* (Mende) means a frog and *beyi* (Wolof) a goat. Many names reflect actions or feelings; *buri* (Mandinka) means to run; *keniya* (Kongo) to grin; *kambalala* (Kongo) to pass a hill along its base in order to avoid climbing. Emotion shines through the word *ayoka* (Yoruba), one who causes joy everywhere; a bond of affection appears in *fabere* (Mandingo), a generous father; and *sabinya* (Bobangi) is to forgive.

Most impressive are personal names that show an African connection through some place or thing unique to that continent. *Asante* (or *Ashanti*) in Twi means the country, people, and language of the Gold Coast, and *Ga* refers to a tribe of that region. Several cities of Africa are remembered as well: *Loanda* in Angola and *Wida* (Whydah) in Dahomey. *Nago* is the Fon name for the Yoruba language of southern Nigeria. Kings of Dahomey during the slave trade are recalled: Akaba ruled from 1680 to 1708, and Agbaja from 1708 to 1729. *Uzebu* (Bini) refers to the quarters of the chief at Benin City; Totela is the title of the kings of Kongo; and Muzumbu is a foreign minister in Angola. Islamic influence is present in several words: *Aluwa* (Wolof) is a tablet in wood on which one writes verses of the Koran; *Hadijata* (Mandingo) is the first wife of Mohammed. Various African legends enrich Gullah names: *Akiti* is a famous hunter in Mandinka folklore who, by conquering the elephant, became king of the bush. The secret societies characteristic of Sierra Leone link the two worlds: *Poro* for boys and *Sande* for girls (Mende).

Equally impressive bridges are the names of species of plants and animals found only in Africa. *Afo* (Yoruba) is the baobab tree; *akodu* (Ewe) is the banana. *Bambo* or crocodile is the totem of a Mandinka clan; *dile* (Mende) is a boa constrictor. *Boma* is a black python, and *pong*i (both Kongo), for chimpanzee, gave rise to the scientific name of another great ape, the orang.

In some cases a master recorded an African name as he understood it from his own European heritage; thus, *Keta*, a common name in Yoruba, Hausa, and Bambara, became Cato; the Mandingo name *Haga* became Hagar. As slave families grew and blacks chose their own names, the concept of kinship, so central to the African way of life, was reflected in their practices. Frequently a child was named for a grandparent. In Africa, while the relationship of a parent to a child might be a harsh one of superordinate to subordinate, their authority was checked by a gentle grandparent who maintained a more friendly familiarity.

That African names and naming practices still live on is shown by ninety- eight nicknames on Johns Island. Some thirty- one are related to a name found in Turner's list with an African equivalent, but a few are newly found Africanisms. Do- um, suggesting "do it," was earned for assiduous application to an endeavor and audacity in sexual adventures. Cunjie with very broad cheek bones may have come from the Hausa word for cheek. *Yaa* for a girl and *Yao* for a boy, meaning Thursday, keeps alive the Ewe practice for naming a baby for the day of the week on which it was born. Even an English-appearing name like Joe may be an abbreviation of *Cudjo*, a male born on Monday. Similarly, Phoebe

may really be *Fiba*, a girl born on Friday. Gussie may not be from Augustus but from the *Bambara gasi*, meaning misfortune; and Pompey is not necessarily the famed Roman general but the Mende name *kpambi,* meaning a line, course, or red handkerchief. A derogatory term, such as *Boogah*, meaning something frightful in Vai, or Nuttin, for nothing, seems strange until one recalls the African practice of giving an uncomplimentary name to the newborn so that the ancestors might not be jealous and take the child back.

Even an English nickname follows the African practice of noting appearance, personality, or relationship. Thus Blue or Shadda (Shadow) are assigned to those quite dark in skin color. One named Licky- too defeated an antagonist both in verbal and physical combat; Butcher is a big, aggressive man ready to slaughter one who offends him; and Prosper was conferred on one distinguished and successful member of the community. Kinship is cherished through nicknames today. Bubba is the equivalent of the English brother; Betsy Ben indicates that Ben is the son of Betsy; and Minna Bill is the nickname for Minna's grandson Bill. Yes, there is even Do- um Bubba, the younger brother of Do- um.

Counting African Connections

Identification of a word in an African language most similar to a word in Gullah permits an initial estimate of the linguistic influences on the sea island dialect. African languages with the number and frequency of all Gullah personal names that Turner found to resemble each of them is revealing (see table “16”). Yoruba is in first place in personal names, followed closely by Kongo; with Mende and Ewe; these four contribute half of the linguistic similarities of personal names. Added to Bambara, Twi, Vai, Hausa, Fon, Umbundu, Mandinka, and Kimbundu, the twelve account for 87 percent of all Gullah names. Grouped by regions, roughly 44 percent are from people clustered around the Bight of Benin and Gold Coast- - far more than represented by the direct slave import from this area, 26 percent from Congo and Angola, 16 percent from Senegambia, and 14 percent from Sierra Leone and Windward Coast.

But a similar sound does not prove a linguistic derivation; personal names could be fossilized forms remembered when their meaning is lost. The 251 words cited by Turner as used in conversation must also be examined for indications of African affinities. Many of these common words have entered everyday American speech. Benne seed candy or cookie is derived from the word for sesame in Wolof and in Bambara. *Bidibidi* for a small chicken in Kongo is no doubt the source of our word “biddy.” Cooter is about as well known in many parts of the South as turtle or tortoise which it means in Bambara, Malinke, Efik and Tshiluba.

Buckra, long known on the coast for white man, means he who surrounds or governs in Ibo and in Efik. Da, often heard in the Carolina Low Country for an elderly black woman, is mother or eldest sister in Ewe and eldest daughter in Ibo. Gumbo is the well known name for a soup with okra in it; tshingombo in Tshiluba and Umbundu means okra. Goober from nguba in Kimbundu and pinder from mpinda in Kongo are widely recognized as other words for peanut. The yam or sweet potato of America has the same name in Mende and a similar one in other West African tongues.

Could *shindu*, noise made by the feet in Gullah and in Kongo, have given rise to shindig? In Tshiluba *samba* means to jump about; in Bobangi *somba* means to dance the divination dance; and in still other Bantu languages its meaning is related to worship. Voodoo, the religious healing ritual well known in Haiti, with a counterpart of Hoodoo in Gullah, is from *vodoo*, a tutelary deity or demon in Ewe, and a good or bad spirit in Fon. The shout, a religious ring dance performed until exhaustion in some black churches, could be related to the Arabic word *shaut* which means to move around the Kaaba on the pilgrimage to Mecca until exhausted. Arabic, the heritage of Moslem slaves, was an influence in the tabby house along the coast, made of cement and oyster shells with brick often added, for *tabix* means cement, mortar, brick.

In the frequency of conversational words in Gullah, listed by Turner (table “16”), Kongo leads overwhelmingly with ninety- nine words, 25 percent of the total. Far behind, with only 8 percent each, are Mende and Vai from Sierra Leone and Liberia. Wolof with 6 percent, spoken by many interpreters in West Africa, was even more widespread as a second language than as a native tongue. Strikingly, Yoruba, so prominent in personal names, makes a negligible contribution to other words.

The ninety- two words that Turner heard only in stories, songs, and prayers are derived almost exclusively from Mende, 69 percent, and from Vai, 29 percent; only a single exclamation is attributed to Bambara or Mandinka. This overwhelming influence from the Sierra Leone- Windward Coast region is noteworthy. If all words, personal and otherwise, are combined, the greatest similarities of Gullah are to Kongo and Yoruba with 15 percent each (table “16”, last column). Mende, Ewe, Bambara, Twi, Vai, Hausa, Fon, Umbundu, Mandinka, and Kimbundu follow in that order, these dozen languages comprising 86 percent of the total. Since names make up 91 percent of the total vocabulary this similarity to their frequency is not surprising.

Language is made up of more than words. Turner discovered affinities of Gullah to African languages in sounds and intonations, syntax and morphology, and unusual word formations illustrated below. One striking syntactical feature of Gullah is the absence of the passive voice. Instead of "he was beaten," it is "they beat him." Examples of the same practice in several African languages suggest their relationship to the Sea Islands. Two or more verbs for one idea is a second trait common to Gullah and some African languages: "Dat mek dem to save de money." Gullah also has an unfamiliar way of comparing adjectives: "He tall pas me," i.e., "He is tall, surpasses me," replaces "He is taller than I am." Eliding adjective and verb into one is common in Gullah and African tongues: e.g., "He mean tid dat" for "He was mean to do that." "Day clean broad" for "broad daylight," placing an adjective after the noun it modifies, is an example of word order that makes Gullah colorful and distinctive. "A child bad" or "tree high" or "I not see him" are other illustrations with African counterparts.

"Two baskets, what do they come to?" can be heard any day on the streets of Charleston. Opening a sentence with a subject and repeating it with a pronoun is an attribute of Gullah and African syntax. So is the frequent repetition of words or phrases. "I heard the house cracking, you know at the back; heard the house cracking, cracking, and I listened; kept listening."

Morphological features refer to number, tense, case, and gender. The same form in singular and plural is typical, e.g., "five dog." Verbs likewise may take the same form in singular and plural, without inflections; thus, "he go" and "they go." "I go, I went, I shall go," may also be indicated with the same phrase. When the patient tells the doctor, "I bees sick," she connotes both that she is, and has been, sick. For nouns and pronouns, subjective, objective, and possessive are almost the same: "me" or "we" could be used for all three cases. Thus, "We do everything for we- self." Gender can be expressed by the addition of "woman" or "man" to a noun: a "woman child" for a girl, or a "man chicken" for a rooster. When Gullah and African expressions are written side by side in phonetics the similarities are striking.

A- beat- on- iron can be heard in coastal Carolina for mechanic, one example of unusual word formation. Others include sure dead for cemetery; to crack teet' for to speak; and big eye for covetous. Reduplicated forms abound: sure enough sure for very sure; dere dere for exactly there, and bang bang for a loud noise. Among common onomatopoietic expressions is “who who” for owl.

The sounds of Gullah are similar to those of West or Central African languages rather than English. To the trained ear the vowel sounds of Gullah are not identical to those of English, but closer to those in several African languages. Another Gullah trait borrowed from Old World ancestors is adding a vowel or dropping a final consonant to avoid a cluster of consonants; palmetto becomes palimetto.

No characteristic of Gullah speech appears so strange to the outsider as its intonation. Gullah is not a tonal language in which a different tone conveys a different meaning, but its patterns are reminiscent

of African languages that do. The difference in tone and inflection enabled slaves to use ambiguities of Gullah to conceal meanings from white masters but reveal them to their fellows. For example, the adjective bad, pronounced with a slow falling tone like baaad could be an expression of admiration for another slave who had successfully flouted Ole Maussa's rules.

Beyond words and grammar is the retention of whole proverbs from African languages, Hausa, Mandingo, Yoruba, Dahomean, Fante, and Bantu. "Chattering doesn't cook rice" among the Hausa becomes "Promisin' talk don' cook rice" in coastal Carolina. "Empty sack can't stand upright alone" is almost identical to a Mandingo expression. Dahomey "Crooked wood makes crooked ashes" is transformed in Gullah into "Onpossible to get straight wood from crooked timber."

The frequency of Turner's citations of twenty- three African languages for six attributes of sound and grammar of Gullah provides a clue to affinities, even though they are not precise or of equal value. The pattern that emerges bears only modest resemblance to that from vocabulary alone. High on the list are Ewe with 17 percent of the total, chiefly because of its contribution to phonetics, Yoruba with 14 percent, Ibo with 11 percent, and Twi with 8 percent. These four, which show affinities to half of the non- vocabulary features of Gullah, are followed by Efik and Fante. Notably, all six of these languages are spoken in the area from the Gold Coast through Nigeria, while Kongo and other speech of Central Africa play a minimal role in sounds or grammar. Surprisingly, Mende and Vai, which supply so much vocabulary to Gullah, are cited rarely for these other linguistic attributes. The texts in Turner, however, illustrate the relation of Gullah to both languages: Three Mende and two Vai songs, plus Mende expressions in three stories. In fourteen other tales African elements are said to be manifest in syntax, morphology, sounds, intonations, and word formation more than in vocabulary, but specific languages are not cited by Turner.

In summary, Ewe ranks high in its role in personal names, other words, grammar and sounds in Gullah. Yoruba, highest in personal names and high in syntax and sounds, contributes few other words to the sea island vocabulary. Kongo, highest in total vocabulary, appears to have less influence on the other features of language. Twi appears to be moderately influential in all linguistic features. Mende and Vai, with much input into vocabulary and entire stories, appear low in any grammatic or phonetic contribution to Gullah. Efik, high in similarity of intonation especially, makes only a negligible impression on names or other words along the Carolina- Georgia coast. Ibo, with so many tonal and syntactic similarities to Gullah, is negligible in its contribution to its vocabulary.

Any attempt to compare linguistic contributions of African coastal regions with their share of slave imports is fraught with many difficulties, linguistic, geographic, and historical, making conclusions tenuous. As critics point out, the same sounds may not convey the same meanings, and ritual terms in songs and prayers may not carry the same weight as other words. The relative input of total words from most regions bears little resemblance to its total direct slave importation. Words used only in conversation, however, yield a closer fit to importation data in almost every case with exact agreement of 39 percent for Angola.

Comparison of the influence of sounds and syntax with slave trade importations is on weak grounds. However, the contribution of the languages spoken by people around the Bights of Benin and Biafra is far greater than their combined contribution to the direct slave trade, while that of Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the Windward Coast, and Angola is far less.

Scholarship following Turner's pioneer work has brought to light a greater role of the Bantu languages in vocabulary, an explanation for the influence of the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin on Gullah grammar, the relation of Gullah to other Atlantic Creole languages, and the process of creolization in their formation. The abundance of Angolans in the slave trade, their early arrival, their employment as field hands away from English, and the mutual intelligibility of Bantu languages probably contributed to the presence of Bantu words in Carolina and Georgia and later in American English.

Development of a Creole Language

To unravel the mystery of the source of Gullah, it is necessary to look beyond words, sounds, and syntax to history and the dynamics of language formation over time. Bilingualism arose along the West African coast with trading by the Portuguese as early as the mid fifteenth century and continued in succeeding centuries with the Dutch, French, and English. As far back as the late sixteenth century, English was spoken around

the Gambia River; in time families were established between English men and native women. The need for communication in business as well as in the home led to the rise of a Pidgin English, such as that among grummettoes, the Africans who looked after slaves awaiting shipment. Pidgin has no native speakers; a marginal language, reduced in structure and vocabulary, it arises to fulfill certain restricted needs of communication among people who have no common language. Such restructured English, with words borrowed from other languages like Portuguese, increased dramatically in the eighteenth century, and Pidgin became established in Nigeria and the Cameroons. Creole refers to a Pidgin language which has become the mother- tongue of a speech community as in several ex-colonial parts of the world. The structural and stylistic range of the pidginized language becomes comparable in formal and functional complexity to other languages. Creole has an expanded vocabulary, explicit grammar, and more fixed pronunciation than Pidgin.

With the slave trade, Creoles developed from new social and cultural contacts in the New World. Africans from varying geographic and linguistic origins underwent language change arising from their need to communicate first with each other and secondarily with Europeans. This ongoing process of creolization was influenced by the plurality of African languages, the absence of formal tutoring, the exclusion of most blacks from close contact with the dominant European language, and the development of their own ethnic identity.

Many native West African languages with common features left a substratum in Creole languages; the basic syntactic structure of the Niger- Congo ones was transmitted to and remained in New World African dialects. In addition, many West African languages have common phonology; for example, the syllable typically ends in a vowel. But fluctuations in speech of African Americans in the formative period of a dialect are due primarily to differences in the phonological systems of native languages of Africans in the contact situation. These influences on Gullah are reflected in Turner's analysis.

Gullah is a unique Creole language, richer in linguistic survivals than any inland black speech. The case for a single ancestor of all English- based Creoles is clearly established by a recent analysis of six critical linguistic features common to them all. The special place of Gullah among English Creoles is probably due to differences in the size of plantations, the ratio of Europeans to Africans, the frequency of contacts between them and English- speaking indentured servants, and the degree of continued homogeneous African language influence.

Two major theories were proposed to account for Gullah. Hancock sees the greater influence of a Krio ancestor from Sierra Leone; Cassidy sees the larger role of the Gold Coast and adjacent Nigeria, via Barbados, as well as Angola. The similarities of Gullah to Krio were long noted by linguists in tales, songs, stories, prayers, names, and ritual terms. Cultural links between that region and the coastal islands also support the argument: the banjo, rice growing techniques, quilts, and more. The large number of slaves from Sierra Leone and Senegambia is said to be responsible for the development of Gullah. Dramatic support for this view came when Joseph Momo, President of Sierra Leone, speaking on St. Helena in his native language, was understood by the sea islanders. Even more impressive is the 1997 visit of sea islanders to Sierra Leone where the natives recognized their speech and responded warmly when Mary Moran from Harris Neck, Georgia, sang the same Mende funeral song that her grandmother had sung for Turner sixty years earlier.

But the value of personal names and items in stories, songs, and prayers has been questioned by Cassidy. Kept in memory by tradition rather than active use, are such fossilized forms more likely to be late comers? Only the words in conversation and in texts, largely Nigerian, may be most significant for analysis. Even more important is the similarity Turner noted in the grammar of Gullah and that of languages of Southern Nigeria and the Gold Coast, for these, like the words in the texts, reflect the earlier layer, the underlying Pidgin. Linguistic and historic evidence indicate the transmission of Gold Coast speech, through Barbados especially, into Gullah and other Atlantic Creoles.

For understanding the roots of Gullah the two views are not as far apart as they appear. Probably arising on the Gold Coast in the 1630s, an English- based pidgin soon spread to other regions of Africa from Senegal to the Bight of Biafra. An expanded pidgin diffused to the New World as English and Dutch vessels delivered people from enclaves in Africa to all of the British possessions in the western hemisphere, where Barbados and Jamaica played a crucial role. Caribbean Creoles influenced Gullah from the beginning of the English settlement in South Carolina; linguistic streams from Africa and the West Indies continued to play upon the Sea Islands. Speech in each colony was shaped by African languages, variations in English dialects, the time of arrival of slaves, and the ratio of blacks to whites. African languages, modified, were kept alive in the West Indies and on the American mainland. Words and syntax from the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin especially persisted in the New World and found their way both directly and indirectly to the shores of Carolina where they formed one early substratum of Gullah. The early influx and later importation of people from Angola brought many words from Bantu, but complexities of its grammar probably prevented its adoption in the Sea Islands. With the tide of other people from Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and on down the coast through the Bight of Biafra, came more words, and even whole stories. The basic lexicon, "deep structure" of grammar, and sounds of Creole were probably established in the early eighteenth century.

Then why did the natives of the Sea Islands understand the Krio of Sierra Leone, and why was the song of Mary Moran recognized there? Not because Gullah is derived directly and exclusively from that area but because their languages have a close common origin. Krio and Gullah are first cousins rather than mother and child. Language is dynamic; the child of history, it interacts continuously with its social setting. Gullah developed over time and also influenced the speech of others. Creole evolved in the Low Country from the need for communication, but it also helped the people to endure the harsh reality of slavery. More than any other attribute, it characterized and molded together the individuals of the sea island community forming an abiding bond of understanding among the slaves. An inflection in the voice, a change in tone, could convey to a fellow black a secret thought hidden from whites. Proverbs also conveyed subtleties and ambiguities that contributed to the survival of the people as they transmuted them into meaningful metaphors in their new environment. Songs, stories, and prayers, even with meanings obscure, kept alive dreams of a dimly remembered past. A basket name known only within the family could survive in the New World, providing a continuing link with the familiar gods, events, places, and traditions of the Old. Naming practices, like names themselves, live on to echo their heritage and often reinforce the uniquely African ties of kinship.

A similar process of continuity and change occurred in all aspects of culture and society. Just as Gullah and Krio are cousins, so the culture of the sea islanders and their African ancestors are related through a common heritage rather than as direct descendants. Subsequent chapters describe particular cultural traits that link the Low Country to Africa, search for their connections to specific regions of that continent, and explore their transformation over time. Consider first how the bonds of kinship, so dear to the African, were re- created and transformed on the Sea Islands.

"How many children you got?"
"Five," replied the woman on James Island, surrounded by children on the porch and others in the yard.
"Come on, you've got more than that."
"Oh, you mean in all."
- - Conversation with author, June, 1957.
For research on inherited blood factors in the 1950s, an accurate pedigree was essential, but digging out relationships of individuals was complex and uncertain.

Blood is Thicker Than Water

Family throughout the Sea Islands has been the important but flexible social unit. The extended family of consanguineous relationships rather than the nuclear family of a single conjugal relationship prevails. Pedigrees reaching over several generations reveal an extensive network of kinship of people on one island. Divorce is rare, and marriage relatively stable, but it may be common- law, recognized in the community, rather than formal and legally sanctioned. In this setting illegitimacy is a meaningless term. A girl in her teens may have a baby—without marriage and without stigma. The child is usually given the surname of the girl's mother, cared for by her and other family members, and just as welcomed as a child born in wedlock who takes the father's surname.

Adoption further complicates family relationships; there is no objection to "giving" a child away to close relatives, who are glad to keep the child and bring it up as one of their own. A woman without children is socially handicapped. In these families of coastal Carolina, as in those of so many African Americans, the woman is the central and most stable member of the household. Elderly females or "mammies" function as matriarchs who teach children proprieties and family lore. The web of kinship documented for Johns Island, involving obligatory mutual responsibilities and the sharing of labor and resources, forms a cohesive force in the community and a strong weapon for survival. The extended family rises to the occasion with food and funds for weddings and funerals. Kinship, along with religion, provides social order, ethical direction, economic succor and emotional security. Where one belongs in the web of kinship is generally maintained by oral tradition; a young person's knowledge of his lineage can spell the difference between a warm and a chilly reception.

Kinship plays a role in the ownership of land. Cooperative organizations evolved among blacks in the Sea Islands after emancipation, following kinship lines as relatives purchased land near each other. To what extent are these social patterns an African heritage? Although slavery was said to have destroyed the nuclear family and social organization of American blacks, Herskovits found much evidence of African roots for family structure along with other elements of culture, and more recent observers concur. Throughout Africa polygyny prevails. A child shares his mother only with full brothers and sisters; he shares his father with the children of other women. The attachments between a mother and her child are in the main closer than those between father and children, and upbringing, discipline, and supervision are much more the responsibility of the mother than of the father. The belief that one is more closely related to mother than to father is explained among the Gullah as it is in West Africa: the person is fed on mother's milk. Matriarchy as practiced in the Low Country probably had roots in kinship patterns of African society, but was molded by modern economic pressures into a new pattern that fulfilled the unique needs of the people.

The extended family also has antecedents in Africa with parallels between its functions in the Old World and the New. The extended family on the sea islands of Carolina bears a remarkable resemblance to that among African people in their homeland and in the Caribbean, Central America, South America and elsewhere in North America. Similarly, adoption of children as a means of enlarging a family is widespread in Africa, and no stigma is attached to the man who "gives" a child to

his sister or other relative. A segment of a lineage serves as a core of an extended family, and newlyweds do not establish a new residence but usually join the household of the husband. The politeness and deference to elders noted in the Gullah people can also be observed in Africa. Such practices, of great value to the people, were retained but modified in their new setting. The removal of slaves from the plantation of their birth by sale to a distant master was less likely on the Sea Islands than elsewhere in the south, so the network of kinship dear to the African provided practical and moral support for adults and transmission of culture to children, in the face of the dehumanizing effect of slavery. In recent years young people from the islands, successful in the North, have returned to their parents' homes with new customs and values. Along with tourism, urbanization, industrial development, land sales, education, and civil rights, they are changing old ways. Yet some features of the past, like ties of kinship, matriarchy, and polygyny, deeply rooted in the traditions of Africa, still survive, not as continuity with Africa but rather a synthesis of old and new in a process of social creolization.

No practice is more meaningful in the life of the sea island people, better illustrates how the different streams of influence flow together, and better reflects the synthesis of an ancient heritage with the culture imposed by the masters than religion.

> God and Man: Religion
> God is the bread of Life
> God will feed you when you get hungry

The Rev. Renty Pinckney starts out slowly and softly in his sermon in the New Jerusalem AME Church on Wadmalaw Island. In sympathetic rhythm the audience shout out their response.

> Oh yes! I know he will. All right! Yeah! Amen!
> Look on the mountain
> Beside the hill of Galilee My Lord!
> Watch his disciple
> Riding on the sea Yeah. Uh huh!
> Tossing by the wind and rain Yeah. Come up
> Going over the sea of temptation Uh hum
> Brother, I don't know
> But I begin to think
> In this Christian life Yes
> Sometime you gone be toss Yes, yeah
> By the wind of life Yes, my Lord!
> The wind gonna blow you
> From one side to the other Yes!

In such point- counterpoint with his listeners the Rev. Pinckney proceeds, growing more eloquent, weaving into his sermon allusions to Moses, the wilderness, the consuming fire, and many other graphic passages from the Bible, and ending up with his opening figure of speech.

The minister's creativity is revealed by his ability to join scattered allusions into a cohesive whole. Well versed in the Bible, he uses the rhetorical skills needed to construct, in sermons and prayers, those long and flowing phrases worthy of Cicero. The call- and- response style with its appealing rhythm which arouses and excites the parishioners is the tradition in the sea island churches. Vital to the religious service is music. Voices singing in a joyous manner and the sound of clapping hands fill the church. Swinging, swaying, shaking bodies soon add even more enthusiastic expression to the fervor of song.

To know how much of the religious beliefs and practices of the Gullah are derived from Christianity, how much from the traditional religions of Africa, and how they interact, one must trace the history of the Protestant churches in the area and explore the major tenets and rituals of the people of Africa.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), the right arm of the Anglican Church founded in 1701, sought to bring the Christian faith to the heathen, Indians and blacks, slave and free, but they were largely ineffective. George Whitefield, a controversial Anglican clergyman of twenty- five, laid the groundwork for Methodism on his first visit to Savannah in 1740. Methodist leaders organized white missions to slaves, stressed that Christianity, properly interpreted, could be a safeguard against rebellion, and created a warm and inspiring service of song and prayer. Low Country blacks had strong preferences for evangelicals whose new style of preaching was attractive because its shouting, swaying, and ecstasy reinforced the slaves' traditional patterns of spirituality.

As the once "dissenting" Baptists increased their numbers among the Low Country planters, blacks were in time admitted into balconies of their churches. By the 1830s "black societies" became the nucleus of the socio- religious community, and by the 1840s the Baptist persuasion clearly dominated the life of the Gullah. It had the greatest appeal for the sea island people because of its less formal worship, democratic and autonomous organization with a minimum of white supervision, appeal to the underprivileged, toleration of emotional expression, and emphasis upon baptism by total immersion – for a reason soon to be seen.

Blacks identified with the suffering Jesus, with His crucifixion and resurrection. The picture of the Children of Israel delivered by Moses, of Daniel in the Lion's Den, of David slaying Goliath were powerful images that gave blacks hope of freedom from bondage. Christianity gave an Old World ideology a New World perception as the Gullah people converted it to their African world view. To the African sense of pride and community, love of home and family, Christianity added cohesion needed to develop a homogeneous people. The “Praise House” was an ideal culture medium for transmitting not only Christianity but what had been retained from Africa. To appreciate this heritage one must explore West African Traditional Religion.

In the Beginning God.

Like most religions, those of Africa begin with God and his creation. In West African traditional religions God is seen, as in the Judeo- Christian heritage, as one- - creator, ruler of the universe, and judge, omnipotent, omniscient, immortal, holy, and compassionate. The idea of creation and sinful man, similar to that in Genesis, is found among the Mende, Akan, Edo, and many other African people. But the native African also believes in other divinities seen as God's intermediaries; worship, rituals and sacrifices designed to invoke them; spirits and ancestors; divination, magic, and witchcraft intended to influence people and events.

The supreme religious experience is possession by the god; a person merges his identity in that of the god and loses control of his conscious faculties, against a background of singing, dancing, and drumming. He begins by clapping his hands, nodding his head, and patting his feet to the rhythms of the drums. His motions become more emphatic; his head is thrown from side to side and his arms thresh about him. He dashes to the center of a cleared space, and gives way to the call of the god, running, rolling, falling, jumping, spinning, talking in tongues, and prophesying. His frenzy continues unabated until he falls in a faint.

The roots of the religious services among the Gullah- speaking people of the Sea Islands, with fervent singing, dancing and praying, like one possessed, culminating in the ring shout, now become clear. Spirit possession was reinterpreted in Christian terms. Even the style of preaching with its moving call- and- response can also be observed in Nigeria today.

In Africa priests are respected leaders in the service of a particular deity, often functioning in his worship at a shrine in a sacred locality. Worship of the divinity may take many forms: invocations, libations, offerings, prayers, and songs; sacrifice sought to propitiate a god or ward off a pending disaster.

Prominent in West African religion is the medicine man, with his special knowledge of herbs and healing, for faith and health are intertwined; the diviner, who learns the signs of the unknown, conveys mysteries, settles disputes, and gives guidance in daily affairs. They too have their counterparts along the coast of Carolina. Readily, the black folks in the New World continued the joyous religious celebrations, similar to the Yam Festival of West Africa, often marking seasons of the year, the planting or harvesting of crops. The concept of the body, soul, and spirit of man in African religion is fundamental to an understanding of his nature and destiny. Whether Yoruba, Ashanti, or Bantu, such a tripartite concept is deeply imbedded in the folk culture of the sea islanders. The body is buried, the soul goes home to the Kingdom of God, but the spirit is still on earth.

> "Everybody got two kinds ob speerit. One is der hebben- goin' speerit...Den dere is der trabblin' speerit...De hebben- goin' speerit don't gib you no trouble, but de trabblin' speerit, 'e be de one dat gib you worriment. E come back to de t'ings 'e like. E try fur come right back in de same house."

The major events in the life cycle of the individual, from birth through puberty, marriage, and death, are often marked by rituals that reflect the deepest beliefs of a people. To the BaKongo the stages of life are symbolized in the Four Moments of the Sun. Its rising represents birth or the beginning; its ascendancy, maturity and responsibility; its setting, death and transformation; and midnight, existence in the other world and eventual rebirth.

At puberty, boys and girls are separated from others and indoctrinated through secret societies in the knowledge needed for adult life under the direction of leaders or spiritual parents, called zo, who hide their identity behind masks. Enforcing conformity to mores, such societies flourished in many West and Central African lands, from the Windward Coast through the Ibo and Ibibio to the Leopard Societies of the Congo. Best known and most elaborate are Poro for boys and Sande for girls among the Mende of Sierra Leone.

These ceremonies introduce young people to society and to the divinities whom they may call upon to guide their lives. These rites reinforce tradition and camaraderie. Most important, this death of childhood and birth of the adult is symbolized in both sexes by wearing new clothes and by ritual washing, total immersion in a river or stream. A Sande initiate wears a white head tie and covers her face with white clay. After completing initiation one has "crossed the water. “ The water spirits are among the most powerful of the supernatural world, and many of their priests undoubtedly found their way to America bringing their lore and practices with them.

The bond between the Baptist faith of the Gullah people and their ancestors is evident. The period of transition between the desire to become a Christian and acceptance by the elders was called "seekin'," for the probationer was seeking Jesus. A female seeker wore a white cloth or string around her head and often covered herself with ashes. Independent of the instruction of Christian missionaries, and often to their dismay, the "seeker" would "travel" or "go into de wilderness" and have visions which he or she related to a spiritual teacher or guide. After this and a declaration of faith to the Praise House members, a further examination determined if one was ready for baptism.

On St. Helena in 1863, when 140 were baptized on a Sunday morning, the candidates arrived “dressed for the water.” The pastor immersed the candidates in the water; each emerged to put on shiny new clothes brought for the purpose. Only then were they full members of the community as well as the church. Outwardly a Christian service, the pageantry and meaning were echoes from the centuries-old practices of the Windward Coast, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Congo. The staff built like a cross

that the deacon drove down to the bottom of the river expressed more than the crucifixion; it was also the symbol of the enormous authority of the religious leader, especially among the BaKongo. Moreover, the cross itself stood for the Four Moments of the Sun that mirrors the life cycle of the individual; the horizontal or Kalunga line from west to east, like water, divides this world of the living from the next. In the world below, or *mpende*, the dead may lose the impurities acquired in this life, and reenter this world at dawn as grandchildren, immortal spirits, or natural forms like rocks or streams. Spiritual parents kept alive the African elements in the "invisible institution" of black religion which, begun in the 1700s, continued to thrive beneath the cloak of Christianity along the coast of Carolina and Georgia.

Since death is a transition from this world to another, the funeral is the climax of life among African people; elaborate rites insure their rightful place in the afterworld and their good will toward the living. Since the hereafter is generally viewed as a carbon copy of earthly life, articles of clothing or trinkets may be placed in the coffin, along with money to enable the dead to cross the river of no return – like the coin to give the helmsman who rows across the River Styx.

It is virtually impossible to identify religious belief or practices of the Sea Islands with any particular African ethnic group, as so many were involved, and changes have taken place on both sides of the Atlantic. More important than identifying groups is the historical sequence. The early cultural dominance of Congo- Angola people in the Low Country was followed by the influence of those of Upper Guinea from Senegambia through the Windward Coast who already found there a creolized black culture. Slaves entrenched in a system of rice production reinforced an Old World heritage. The Middle Period of the slave trade also saw the influx of more Africans from the Gold Coast area. The BaKongo influence served as incubator for many cultural patterns, and superceded Akan- Ashanti impact, but did not smother the Upper Guinea contribution. Each major group left its presence whose longevity depended not only on its number but on its adaptability.

The picture that emerges of religion on the Sea Islands parallels that of language. Customs like the puberty rites of secret societies derive from the Windward Coast; the religious ecstasy of one possessed by the god owes more to the traditions of the Guinea Coast. But the Bantu from Central Africa had an early and lasting effect, especially on deeply held beliefs related to death, burial, and the nature of the soul.

The syncretism of Christianity and African religion is understandable. As the African felt that the god of a conquering tribe must be more powerful, and adopted him while retaining his own, so blacks in America accepted the God or Jesus of those who enslaved them while keeping their belief in other gods. The Christian concept of salvation and the hope of heaven were readily grasped by those whose earthly lives knew labor and the lash. The elders who brought to these shores knowledge of diverse divinities and ancient practices taught them to their children; the deacons of the churches of today are their moral descendants. The strength and flexibility of some African spiritual customs facilitated their merger with Christianity. But the folk religion that evolved in the slave quarters along the Sea Islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was more than a survival, and more than a blend; it was a creolization. The Gullah people adapted African beliefs to their own concept of Christianity in a dynamic and creative synthesis that helped them build a community of strength and solidarity that withstood the hardships of life. Religious faith raised up the slave, gave him hope and moral superiority, and contradicted the dehumanizing experience of slavery.

Syncretism is dramatically illustrated by Maum Hester of South Carolina in the 1920s who believed that each day that passed carried with it deeds and thoughts performed by each person. The sun carried the record to the center of the earth, where the moon and stars, the signs and seasons, all rested until their time to appear. The "Lawd Jedus" presided over the entrance to this region. Her chief concern was that the record which the sun bore to the Lawd Jedus each night might prove acceptable to Him.

Each morning she went through a ritual. When she saw the sun she repeated three times the formula: "Do Lawd Jedus, is I please you dis day?" Each time, she walked around the room in a circle with a peculiar posture, step, and rapt expression characteristic of the ring shout. After the third question her emotional state bordered on hysteria. "But the t'ird time, de sun he 'gin move, I see he shoutin.' Den I happy, by I know den I done please de Lawd Jedus dat day."

Only the figure of Jesus is Christian; all else is BaKongo. No sharp line can be drawn between religion, magic, and healing, especially in Africa and the Sea Islands. The Divine Healer dispenses health, and various incantations may be used to induce the divinities to cure illness. The powerful influence of magic along the Georgia coast illustrates this principle and its African antecedents.

Magic and Mystery

> I dohn know who done it, but all ub a sudden muh leg begin tuh swell an swell. I call a regluh doctuh, but he didn seem tuh do no good; so tree weeks ago I went tuh a root man. He gimme sumpm tuh take an sumpm tuh put in muh bed. In a few days knots come out all obuh muh leg an wuhrums staht tuh crawl out. Only one knot lef. I guess I soon be well.

Martha Major from Yamacraw near Savannah was explaining to the visitors from the Georgia Writers' Project how she had been conjured and the root doctor had relieved her misery. Their book, *Drums and Shadows*, filled with such examples of the practices of sea islanders of the 1930s in their own words, along with African counterparts, did for beliefs what Turner did for language.

Many informants were reluctant to talk of conjuring, so strong was the fear of such magic among the descendants of African slaves. The long history and powerful influence of conjuring is illustrated by an ad in a Savannah newspaper of 1788 for a runaway slave. He was "called Doctor Hercules from his remarkable conjurations of pigs' feet, rattlesnakes' teeth, and from the feet and legs of several sick people, many of whom still believe him in reality to have performed miracles."

While anything may be used to "fix" a person, from roots and powder to hair and nail- clippings, most effective is graveyard dirt, preferably from the grave of one who has been murdered. Serpents, feared in Dahomey and among the Ibibio and other people of southern Nigeria, frequently play a prominent role in conjuring. One Gullah woman said of another, "She wuk a root on me so strong dat she put a big snake in muh bed, and uh could feel tings moobin all tru muh body. I could feel duh snake runnin all tru me."

Root doctors take their name from the various roots and herbs used in healing, for their magic is not all harmful. George Little, who said he had been born with a special knowledge of healing, listed a dozen roots in his pharmacopeia. A self- professed root doctor and fortune teller, James Washington, explained that he could tell the future because he was born with a double caul. He said that some magic can guard you from harm, but evil magic can put you down sick; hair is the most powerful thing an enemy can get hold of because it is so close to the brain. The root doctor thus revealed several beliefs with well known African antecedents. The special power of those born with a caul is recognized in Dahomey; the importance of the diviner or fortune- teller is known to the Ashanti; the place of hair in magic is widespread among many Africans from the Ewe to the Mpongwe; and the role of conjure and charms is universal.

Dr. Ramsay Mallette, former Professor of Psychiatry at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, trained his residents to perform similar magic to reverse the hex laid upon the patient whose fear of death is paralyzing. His video tape of this healing procedure, complete with the instruments of conjure that produced recovery, is a gripping demonstration of the power of belief.

From birth to death, superstitions govern the life of these natives of coastal Georgia. As among the Ibo, being born with teeth is usually considered extremely unlucky. Charms are worn by most people to ward off evil spirits. If that silver dime surrounding the woman's ankle turns black, it is a sure sign that she has been conjured.

A witch or hag, well known in Africa, is the disembodied spirit of an old woman. Leaving her body during sleep, she rides another person, sometimes causing illness, and various charms must be worn to ward off this evil influence. A witch leaves her skin behind when entering one's home. Witches are more feared than ghosts, especially when they get a grudge against someone. The most dramatic thing witches do is fly away. All of these beliefs have their African counterparts.

At the funeral on the Georgia coast, awesome practices prevent the return of the ghost. At the "settin' up" or wake, bread and coffee are usually served to the mourners, as among the Ibo and many Sudanese groups; each of them pours some on the ground for the spirit of the deceased, as done among the Efik, the Ashanti, the Dahomeans, and other West African people.

"Den at duh time fuh buryin, duh drum would beat an all would lay flat on duh groun on dey faces befo duh body wuz placed in duh grave. Den all would rise and dance roun duh grave. Wen duh body wuz buried, duh drum would give signal wen all wuz tuh rise aw fall aw tuh dance aw sing." Such customs are reminiscent of those of the Mandingo and Ashanti. All must bid farewell to the corpse, either speaking a few words or touching it, as done on the Gold Coast. The service isn't over until each one has thrown a handful of dirt in the grave, a custom known in Nigeria and among Bantu nomads of Bechuana.

Adorning the grave is well known to the Georgia blacks, and woe to one who steals anything from it, even a broken mirror, for bad luck will follow him. Departed spirits or ghosts inhabit the world of the living, often taking the form of animals or dwarfs. The rebirth of the spirit as an animal is reported among the Yoruba, and the backward- facing dwarf is commonplace among people of the Gold Coast. In the bestiary of the sea islands are boo- hags, boo- daddies, drolls, conjure- horses, and plat- eye, a hideous and greatly feared one- eyed ghost who takes various shapes and forms when one places the head of a murdered man in a hole with treasure. An original blend of African tradition, self- reliance, and Christianity is illustrated by the defense against plat- eye of a former slave, Maum Addie,. "So I totes my powder en sulfur en I carries mah stick in mah han en puts mah truss in Gawd."

The search for links of Georgia coastal blacks with African groups is on shifting sands, for most of these beliefs and practices are widespread and have changed over time on both continents. The most commonly cited ethnic group in *Drums and Shadows* is Ibo; a black on Sapelo, St. Simons, and St. Mary's told of grandparents or other ancestors of that group. "Ibo's Landing" on St. Simons is named for those freshly brought from Africa who, refusing to be enslaved, marched into the water and were drowned. Their self destruction supports the view of Henry Laurens that slaves from Calabar were liable to commit suicide.

The persistence of Moslem practices on the Georgia coast reported in the 1930s indicates late importation of people from northern Nigeria or the western Sudan. Katie Brown of Sapelo told of the regular ritual prayers of her great grandfather Belali Mohomet on his prayer rug. Slave driver to Thomas Spaulding, Belali had among his many daughters Magret, Bentoo, Chaalut, Medina, Yaruba, Fatima, and Hestuh. Magret's granddaughter Katie Brown recollected:

> "Magret an uh daughtuh Cotto use tuh say dat Belali an he wife Phoebe pray on duh bead. Dey wuz bery puhticluh bout duh time dey pray an dey bery regluh bout duh hour. Wen duh sun come up, wen it straight obuh head an wen it set, das duh time dey pray. Dey bow tuh duh sun an hab lill mat tuh kneel on. Duh beads is on a long string. Belali he pull bead an he say, 'Belambi, Hakabara, Mahamadu.' Phoebe she say, 'Ameen, Ameen.'"

While these are clearly Moslem practices, albeit truncated, the three times a day for prayer also coincide with the Moments of the Sun in the Cosmogram of the BaKongo. Like religious belief, magic prevailed in the new setting because it held such a firm grip upon the mind, helped one cope with the unknown, and provided some sense of protection in a threatening world. More than religion, however, it appealed to baser instincts of fear. More a secret practice than a social one it said, "My will be done," rather than "Thy will be done." One proverb expressed the hope of those struggling to survive in a hostile environment: "Black people rule sickness with magic but white people get sick and die." Inseparable from deeply held beliefs on the sea islands are the joyous sounds of music that also reflect the African connection.

Music Hath Charms

Guy Carawan said that he knew he was in heaven when the singing began at a Christmas Eve Watch in Moving Star Hall on Johns Island. Some woman with a thick, rich low alto started off in the corner and very soon was joined by some deep, resonant male "basers" from another corner. The falsetto wails and moans sailed in to float on high over the lead. By the time the whole group of about sixty worshippers had joined in, each freely improvising in his or her own way, the hall was rocking and swaying to an ecstatic "Savior Do Not Pass Me By."...Song followed song with different people taking turns leading off as the spirit moved them.

After a while different individuals began to pray and give personal testimony while everyone else hummed, wailed, moaned and answered fervently in response. That sound was the strangest and most beautiful of all. . . The total sound was beyond description. As the fervor mounted at the end of each prayer or testimony, the congregation would soar back into song, sparked by the testifier or by someone who felt a particular song at the moment. Carawan continued to capture in words the magic of hands clapping, heads and bodies swaying, and feet tapping in time with the singing, culminating in shouting and dancing. The whole building was rocking in rhythm. A near perfect sense of timing made it a group form of expression.

The world has come to appreciate the unique beauty of the spiritual, with its rich melody, appealing rhythm, and qualities of the human voice that seem to rise directly from the soul. W. E. B. DuBois wrote that "the Negro folk- song - - the rhythmic cry of the slave- - stands to- day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas."

The teachers and missionaries who flocked to St. Helena in the 1860s were struck by the soulful singing of the blacks. The difficulty of capturing the character of these "negro ballads by mere musical notes and signs" was well recognized by Lucy McKim, who published the first songs of the Port Royal Contrabands. "The wild, sad strains tell, as the sufferers themselves never could, of crushed hopes, keen sorrow, and a dull daily misery which covered them as hopelessly as the fog from the rice-swamps. On the other hand, the words breathe a trusting faith in rest in the future- - in 'Canaan's air and happy land,' to which their eyes seem constantly turned."

Col. Thomas Higginson, who raised the first slave regiment mustered into Union service, interspersed similar sentiments between his published spirituals. In the song, "I Know Moon- Rise," he was especially moved upon hearing the words: "I'll lie in de grave and stretch out my arms." "Never, it seems to me, since man first lived and suffered, was his infinite longing for peace uttered more plaintively than in that line."

The Bible was a gold mine to the slave; he transmuted the Christian tradition into a fresh and vivid lyric poetry to express his concealed hope and his desire for freedom and justice. In the cryptic language of freedom, Cana'an also meant Canada, one terminal of the Underground Railroad, conductors were called Moses, and the chariot was a symbol of escape. "Live Humble" was an exhortation to be patient a little longer, and "Daniel" expressed faith in deliverance.

As the revival movement by the early 1800s brought south many hymns sung in camp meetings attended by blacks and whites, their singing styles influenced each other; and hymns were readily adopted by the slaves. Each line of a hymn read aloud as the audience repeated it; such "lining out," accorded well with call- and- response. Black religious songs, known in the 1820s, were composed by them by the 1840s; the spiritual was fully developed by 1856. Songs of blacks show that their rhythmical and structural elements came from Africa, although the product is native American. What impressed missionaries on St. Helena most was the Ring Shout, a dance of religious ecstasy, half pow-wow, half prayer- meeting, with chants and song, seen as barbaric by most whites who did not appreciate its meaning and origin. Work songs were also common on the Sea Islands, whether in rowing boats or thrashing rice sheaves. Each plantation had its own songs and took pride in singing them. Dance also characterized life on the sea islands, often reflecting work patterns, as in "New Rice an' Okra," when scuffing off the outside husks of rice. Rhythm and improvisation, that characterized dance and song, were a group activity and a part of everyday life.

Music fills the life of the African from birth to death, closely associated with the gods, magic, and healing. A wide variety of native instruments are played there, including drums and fiddles, and the bania, the forerunner of the banjo; but the human voice is the crowning instrument. Even on the slave ship; the memory of African music was kept alive, and in America black mothers passed on melodies to their children. The ring shout, songs, spirituals, and instruments of the Sea Islands can be traced to Africa. Sounds born there came to enrich American music.

Music from Africa was retained among the Gullah because it expressed feelings of joy or of grief, promoted physical and spiritual well- being, provided escape from drudgery, molded the young, and fostered a sense of community. Slaves speaking different tongues could communicate feelings in this universal language, and music at funerals united the living with the dead. Sacred songs, echoing religion, evolved from the syncretism of Christianity and African belief, and some also contained a veiled cry for freedom.

One other activity transmitted to the Sea Islands that kept alive memories and raised the morale of the people provides another opportunity to discover both African roots and adaptation in a new environment.

Thereby Hangs a Tale: Folklore

The story of the mock plea of Brother Rabbit who is thrown into the briar patch that he pretends to fear, familiar for more than a century to millions since childhood, is one of the well known animal tales of *Uncle Remus* by Joel Chandler Harris. But it is still alive in a modern story- telling session on Wadmalaw Island. The audience response makes it even more vibrant. When the speaker imitates the whining and whimpering of Ber Rabbit and adds the squinched eyes, wrinkled nose, gestures of face and hands, and bodily movements, his listeners go wild with laughter.

Many cantefables, or "singing tales," abound on the sea islands where they have educated and delighted the inhabitants for generations. The Tar Baby of well- nigh universal distribution is another favorite in coastal Carolina. Why the wide appeal of the short accounts of talking animals, mythical creatures, and heroes of extraordinary powers? Some serve as escape literature; some explain the origin of the cosmos and its creatures; others are instructive; and in some settings they may contain a hidden message. Tracing connections through folktales is virtually impossible. The same stories are spread over many lands; those collected are only a fraction of all known to a people, and they are filtered through alien listeners; two tales with the same theme are not identical in content or style; through improvisation the tale is transformed with each telling; and the setting, gestures, intonations, acting, and even audience response are just as important as the story itself.

Missionaries and travelers were aware of the rich vein of tales that natives of Africa told, intertwined with their history and mythology. Stories from Sierra Leone, told in dialect, usually at night around a

campfire, display the dramatic power of the storyteller and the musical quality of the chants accompanied by the clapping of hands. The trickster animal is widely known and loved; physically insignificant, seemingly helpless, and yet endowed with extraordinary mental acumen, his triumphs are an approved outlet for difficulties experienced by oppressed people. Tales of the small animal who outwits bigger ones are widespread throughout Africa, frequently the rabbit in Sierra Leone and Nnabe, the turtle, on the Slave Coast. “Anansi,” the spider, featured in tales of the Temne and Limba of Sierra Leone, is even better known in Ghana and the Gold Coast. Shrewd and designing, selfish, deceitful, and sometimes cruel, the spider appears in half of the folk tales of West Africa. This wily creature is well known in the West Indies too, where his scheming nature reflects the subtlety necessary for survival, and connects Africa, the Caribbean, and Carolina. In the sea islands, the name readily became "Aunt Nancy."

Soon after Northerners arrived on St. Helena, they became aware of the rich treasure of stories known to the people of the region. The most complete collection of sea island tales was made by the folklorist Elsie Clews Parsons. Her densely packed volume (1923) contains 178 tales, many of them with several variants, plus riddles, proverbs, toasts, verses, songs, folkways, and notions, told in dialect. Her ninety informants were primarily from St. Helena and Port Royal, with the remainder from the neighboring islands.

Here one finds animals well known to southerners- - dog, fox, wolf, rat, cat, bullfrog, alligator, turtle, squirrel, raccoon, partridge, rooster, crane, chicken, duck, and rattlesnake. But also mentioned are the tiger and imaginary people with magic powers unlike anything in the environment. Some tales point a moral, often the small and smart outwit the large and stupid; others explain an origin as in the Just So Stories. An African provenience is cited for too few tales to be meaningful, but Sierra Leone is most common in West Africa. Similarities of the sea island stories to those of the West Indies, especially the Bahamas, reflect the common origins of the people. The three Gullah stories containing Mende expressions recognized by Turner show imagination as well as further affinity to Sierra Leone:

The dean of folklore, William R. Bascom, collected several hundred tales, and grouped them into fourteen themes; some 267 tales are from Africa, sixty from South Carolina, and thirty from Georgia. The relative contribution from regions of West and Central Africa to the sea islands roughly resembles their slave importations, with two important exceptions: Nigeria contributes 25 percent while Angola yields only 18 percent. Of greater interest, themes most frequent in South Carolina and Georgia are also common in Ghana and Nigeria. Most often mentioned tribes in West Africa are Yoruba, Hausa, Ashanti, Mossi, and Temne. Some common ideology binds together the sea islands and West Africans.

With all the difficulties of defining particular tales, and their transformations over time to fit the new conditions of life on the sea islands, it is impossible to pinpoint their African origins; all regions contributed. As with grammar, the Guinea coast people probably gave more folklore than their direct slave import to Carolina, in part because of the passage of many people from this region through the West Indies.

More than one story, however, relates the Yoruba to Johns Island. In both areas the tortoise as trickster represents the little man getting through the difficulties of life with license to act outside the rules of society. Common to Yoruba and Johns Island are not only the well- known Tar Baby story but a striking explanation of an eclipse as the result of an argument between the sun and the moon.

Several folktales and the style of telling them are common to Wadmalaw Island and the Ibo of Nigeria. The closest parallel is in a classic morality tale in which the remains of a murdered person indict the one who committed the foul crime. In the Wadmalaw version the mother kills her daughter for stealing three pears, and buries her in a field where onions grow in the spring. The effort by Brother, Daddy and finally Mama herself to pull up the presumed onions produces this refrain from the victim:

Mama, Mama, Mama
Don't you pull me hair
You know you kill me
Bout the three li pear.

In the parallel Ibo version, an older son kills his younger brother for a flower; one of his bones later sings out:

Mama, Mama, Mama
The bone you are looking at
Is that of him who went
To the bush with his brother
His brother killed him
For the sake of his flower.

Folk tales from Sierra Leone, like songs and prayers, probably entered the Sea Islands with the rice cultivation in the eighteenth century, and blended with those from other regions. Folklore was retained along the coast as a heart- warming remembrance of the homeland, instruction for the young, and comic relief from daily drudgery. When folklore was told by a gifted raconteur to a responsive audience, a sustaining social bond was forged among the people. Whites would have no incentive to discourage this apparently harmless pastime that kept alive the African heritage. The trickster permitted a satirical picture of the society in which the slave lived; blacks learned the advantage of role playing and adapting to the value system of a clever animal like Ber Rabbit. Some subtle connecting links of Africa to the Sea Islands are expressed with body language rather than with speech.

Gestures and Motions

As the discussion of the two Gullah- speaking black men grows more heated, one of them crosses his arms before his chest to signal the end of the conversation. He is not arguing, but in this somewhat combative situation he is communicating that he definitely does not like what is being laid on him. This gesture, called *tuluwa lwa luumbu* among the Kongo, symbolizes self- encirclement in silence, more powerful than words.

How should such a stance be interpreted in the quest for African retentions? Like dance, a motion of head, body or limb, and the message it conveys, can be transported overseas and over time. While a spontaneous smile is a reflex that transmits a universal meaning, the most simple movement of the head to signal "yes" or "no" varies in meaning among mankind and thus reflects learned behavior. The many gestures of the latter variety that survive among African- derived people in the New World often appear to have Kongo origins.

The Gullah child, rebuked for wrong- doing by her mother, turns her head to one side to avert her gaze and purses her lips in denial and rejection. The Kongo gesture of *nunsa*, with head averted and lips pursed, is well known in Africa both among the living and in sculpture. The related *kebuka* pose of the conga drum player, with head turned to one side while concentrating on his music and shutting out all distractions, can beobserved on both sides of the Atlantic.

Arms akimbo and both hands on the hips, a pose called *pakalala* in Kongo, proclaims that one is ready to accept the challenge of the situation. Used especially among Low Country women, this combative posture expresses contempt. Some gestures of the Kongo, most clearly expressed in Haiti, have made their way into the United States. The pose of *pakalala*, called in Haiti *deu men sou kote*, combining challenge with grace and humor, is used by women while dancing with men.

Placing the left hand on the hip and thrusting the right hand forward, called *biika mambu* or *telama lwinbanganga* by the Kongo, is common in Haiti where it is known as *pose Kongo*. Holding both hands above the head with fingers wide apart, called *booka,* expresses crying out for help, weeping, or proclaiming. Such gestures are also reproduced in sculpture on stone or terra cotta of funeral columns of the BaKongo. Evidently Central Africa had an early and persistent influence on body language as on spoken language in coastal Carolina and the West Indies. Some gestures may come from other regions, but they have not as yet been so well identified. Certain group activities among the Gullah-speakers are derived from other peoples of West Africa.

Sixty years ago Bascom recognized the similarity of certain cooperative work patterns of the Gullah to African ones. On Sapelo Island and Hilton Head, elderly blacks recalled how groups of thirty to fifty people went hoeing side by side while singing in unison to make the work more pleasant and rapid. Such group activity closely resembles the *dokpwe* of Dahomey and the awe, or working bee, of the Yoruba; they also illustrate creolization that arose on the sea islands in an adaptation of labor to a new environment.

In other actions training is needed but inherent capacity may also be involved. Higginson reported:

> I have seen a woman with a brimming water- pail balanced on her head, or perhaps a cup, saucer and spoon, stop suddenly, turn around, stop to pick up the missile, rise again, fling it, light a pipe, and go through many evolutions with either hand or both, without spilling a drop.

Just such a complex sense of balance and motor coordination can be seen widely in Africa.

Not so much the substance itself but rather its usage expresses a cultural affinity and an adaptation. Blacks of coastal Carolina wrap each little strand of hair with white twine and wear a bandana or headkerchief much as their ancestors did in Africa. Hairstyling there is a great art form; a variety of intricate styles are known, such as braiding, wrapping hair to resemble sticks, threading strands to form crowns, and adding colored beads to hair strands. Material culture, no less than beliefs and customs, reflect an African heritage recreated with modifications in the New World. Many crafts of the Sea Islands proclaim this connection, and tangible evidence actually lies buried in the very soil of coastal Carolina and Georgia.

Chapter 6 What the Hand Wrought

"Dave belongs to Mr. Miles
Where the oven bakes and the pot biles"

This verse, imprinted on the side of a large jar made by a slave in the 1840s in South Carolina, illustrates originality, practicality, and African tradition. Whether working in clay or cloth, wood or iron, the African Americans of Carolina and Georgia reflect their Old World artistic heritage adapted to New World needs. Material culture provides further clues to specific links to Africa and their transformation on the Sea Islands.

African Art Reborn

The vibrant color and animation of the rock paintings made 3000 to 4000 B.C. at the Tassili Massif in the middle of the Sahara desert attest to the ability of the artist to capture the image of wildlife that flourished there in the past. Striking terra- cotta heads are known at Nok in present- day Nigeria from before 500 B.C. By the twelfth century A.D at Ife, southwest of Nok, bronze casting by the *cire- perdue* or lost- wax method produced remarkable naturalistic life- like figures. The world- renowned art of Benin, in wood carving and bronze casting, begun by 1280 A.D., flourished there from the fifteenth to

the eighteenth century. Masks associated with secret societies in the western bulge of Africa, stylized to represent animals, are noted for their skillful carving. In the making of boats and drums, masks and musical instruments, wooden stools and figurines to honor ancestors, statues and ceramics, the African displayed a feel for texture, a sense of beauty, and individuality, foreshadowing the hand work on the coast of Carolina. Color was used to enliven arts and crafts, to brighten the walls of a house, ornament a mask or headdress, dye textiles, and decorate pottery, often with symbolic meaning that went beyond esthetics. Everyone, man, woman, or child, learning the traditions of the tribe, took pride in skills required for the household arts, but items for the god or the king were produced by specially designated craftsmen.

With enslavement in the New World, the social fabric, the bonds of kinship, the artifacts made for king or god, and the rituals associated with them, were swept away from the African. Yet the ideas which motivate the creation of an object, along with the innate skill, endured. Many of the raw materials of tidewater Carolina were similar to those in Western and Central Africa, and it was advantageous to white masters to utilize the talents of black bondsmen.

From earliest days Charles Town needed craftsmen of many kinds; white artisans used both white and black apprentices who learned from each other. By the 1760s slave artisans were hired out by the day to clients, and some set up their own shops, paying a percentage of their earnings to their masters. Advertisements for runaway slaves in the eighteenth century attest to their many talents. In time the so- called "Bozal Negro" (or "salt man") fresh from Africa was apprenticed to one born in this country who acted as interpreter and trainer, utilizing skill the newcomer had in his homeland. A blacksmith who knew how to make spears or anklets or iron money in Africa could use the same techniques in making wrought iron gates or mule bits in America. Pride in craftsmanship, as well as talent, carried over into new occupations. Crafts came to be the special province of Free Persons of Color, often passed on from father to son for generations. On the large plantations of the Low Country, the sound of the saw of the carpenter and the anvil of the blacksmith rang out. Each plantation was efficiently run like a small town, supplying most of its own needs and finished products, often with the help of capable artisans. Crafts, such as basketry, sewing, weaving, and net making, were taught by adults to children as they were in Africa.

Thus, an interaction of European and African traditions arose in colonial South Carolina and Georgia that influenced the artifacts of slaves, as it did their language, beliefs, and practices. The style as much as the content revealed the African heritage; improvisation and changing needs helped to reshape the old into the new.

Tales from the Good Earth

If most of us dug into the ground where people had lived in past centuries, the fragments of pottery, bits of animal bones, pieces of metal, and assorted scraps uncovered would mean little. But to the trained archeologist the people and their culture come to life again from small things forgotten.

In antebellum plantation sites excavated, slave quarters are distinct from the master's house. A kitchen leaves different remains than a bedroom; thimbles and spools tell of sewing. In conjunction with the historical record, archaeology sheds light on the African American people and opens one more window in the search for connection to their homeland and transformation in America. African techniques are reflected in many items recovered from the soil of South Carolina from the earliest days of Charles Town into the nineteenth century. They were gradually transformed by European concepts into something new, and they also influenced the styles of the white masters.

Tahro, born in the Central Congo, transported in the slave ship Wanderer to Georgia in 1858, and later brought to Edgefield, South Carolina, constructed a one- room, seven by ten foot, rectangular dwelling with timber frame, lath walls held in place by twine netting, and straw- thatched roof. He said it was like the one he had built in Africa. Col. Higginson noted the African- style huts built by the

newly freed slaves on St. Helena in 1863. Tabby walls and palmetto fronds for roofing are still known in coastal Georgia as well as coastal Guinea, and thatched roofs could be found on the houses of the sea islands even into the twentieth century.

In tracing the story of dwellings in South Carolina, archaeology supplements history; sites excavated along the South Atlantic coast reflect an African heritage. Houses of slaves were more like African ones than those in any other place in the Southeast. Slave quarters of different periods show transition in their construction. The influence of Africa on white architecture is more subtle. When blacks first added a small porch to a cabin it reflected both utility and memory. The "piazza" of the typical Charleston house, which catches the breeze during the heat of the summer, had antecedents in the West Indies and developed slowly. Notably, side porches or piazzas did not become common in that city until refugees arrived from Haiti after 1790. Thus, directly and indirectly via the West Indies, the architectural ideas of Africa crept into South Carolina and Georgia, with a lasting influence on buildings of blacks and whites.

Yard and garden around the home also show African influence. In many societies, notably the Ibo, Idama, and Yoruba of Nigeria, immense value is placed on protecting the sacred soil. The paling fences enclosing small yards on old coastal plantations are strikingly similar to palm rib fences between the dwellings in southwestern Nigeria. The custom of sweeping the yard with a straw broom and using bottles to edge flowerbeds or walkways probably also owes its origin to West Africa, and has retained its utility in America.

Colono Ware

The African heritage and its transformation is dramatically illustrated by pottery found in the soil of Carolina. Archeologist Leland Ferguson found that hand- built, unglazed, clay pots from colonial sites, attributed to Native Americans and called "Colono- Indian," were also made by African Americans. Such pottery was far more frequent than all other types combined, more common in rural than urban settings, and abundant wherever slaves had lived. They made up 87 percent of ceramics at the slave quarters at Yaughan, near Georgetown, but only 16 percent at the planter's house at Drayton Hall, near Charleston. Evidently fired at a low temperature and unglazed, their shape, coarse, thick walls, loop handles, and round bottoms indicated their manufacture by blacks. "Wasters," or pieces fractured during firing, clumps of unfired clay, and even finger marks indicate that the vessels had been made by slaves for their own use.

Some pottery, christened "Colono Ware," bore striking similarity to some African forms. It predominated in the early eighteenth century and declined rapidly with the end of the slave trade in the nineteenth, as more glazed, European- style pottery appeared. Colono Ware died out about the same time that African- style buildings yielded to European- style ones on plantations, an example of cultural adaptation. Blacks in the West Indies made similar pottery, and still do today. Bowls for cooking and eating found at an eighteenth century slave site at Drax Hall, Jamaica, are called "jabba" after a Twi word meaning earthenware vessel or dish; a contemporary pot from Nevis near Barbados shows the same traits as those from Carolina.

Pottery- making has a long and impressive history in Africa. Appearing in a Nigerian rock shelter soon after 4000 B. C., it reached an outstanding technical level by the beginning of the first millennium A. D. It is also known from megalithic sites in Senegambia and Mali by the second half of that millennium, reaching a climax in the artistic creations in terra- cotta at Nok. Cooking jars and serving bowls are known from the Fulani to the Kongo- - and the potsherds left behind are similar to those found in colonial Carolina. Using the same techniques, the eighteenth- century black Carolinian potters transmitted the heritage of their ancestors. A surprising discovery associates people of Central Africa with some vessels.

Strange marks were centered on the bottom of a few Colono Ware bowls. A cross frequently occurred inside a ringed base, but never on cooking jars or pots of any clearly European ware. Most remarkable, of seventeen such pieces, thirteen were from underwater sites, five at Pimlico and eight at Mepkin Plantation, both along the Cooper River, although terrestrial sites are far more common. With its quadrants and circle, was this the famous Cosmogram of the BaKongo people that traces the cycle of life? As their *minkisi* or sacred medicine was prepared by the progenitor of their kingdom himself in an earthenware pot, what could be a better container for healing magic than a clay bowl? One can imagine an African slave, seeking a cure for a dying child, stealing away in the dead of night to the river bank and hurling the bowl with its magic symbol into the water, so that its message might travel to that other world, reverse an evil spell, and save a loved one. The beliefs of Central Africa literally sank deep into the soil of Carolina. Clay jugs with faces of bulging white eyes and large clenched teeth made by African Americans in the early 1860s near Edgefield in Aiken County suggest a grotesque ferocity. Did they convey the emotions of resentment, anger, or satire of these slaves closely akin to the sea islanders? Most of the Africans landed on Jekyll Island, Georgia, by the slave ship *Wanderer,* who ended up near Edgefield were Kikongo speakers.

Style and usage indicate an African inspiration for these Carolina ceramics as well as connections to the West Indies. The terra- cotta traditions at Nok and Ife still live among Africans who fashion clay figures today. Inspiration for the sculpture of the nineteenth- century black Carolinians probably had several sources, from Sierra Leone through Ghana to the Bantu of Central Africa. Half- remembered forms, available material, originality, and the opportunity to express in clay feelings of resistance or ridicule of masters combined with demand to produce aflorescence of unique sculpture, a further example of creolization.

Food for Thought

What we eat and how we eat it, products of culture, are reflected in the deposits left behind in the dust as archaeology again supplements history. Of some dozen sites on the coast of South Carolina and Georgia that have yielded secrets of the past life of African Americans, especially rich are those from Couper's plantation at Cannon's Point on St. Simons Island from 1794 through 1860. Archaeology of Barbados and Jamaica also provide important links between Africa, the West Indies, and the Low Country.

The careful analysis of animal remains from the slave quarters of Tidewater plantations shows that blacks supplemented their rations of corn, meal, rice, vegetables, and a little pork with whatever they could catch in the woods or the waterways, for the bones of wild animals and fish outnumber those of domestic animals two to one. Lead shot, gunflints, and fishhooks in slave cabins give further evidence of this dietary supplement. Remains in the earth show that the manner of partaking of food in the New World continued the habits of the Old. In West and Central Africa the starchy main dish of millet or rice or maize (after 1500) is usually boiled in a large jar; a vegetable relish with a little meat or fish added is cooked in a smaller one. The main dish is then served in a large bowl, the relish in smaller ones. Sitting upon the ground in a group, native Africans take a ball of the starchy main dish in their hands and dip it into the relish. That this custom is widespread in space and time is borne out by travelers' accounts from Mali in 1352, the Gambia River in 1623, Sierra Leone in 1803, and Angola in 1865, down to the present- day Mossi and the Dukkawa of Nigeria.

The communal African style of cooking, eating, and drinking, learned by children from their parents, survived in America. Such techniques may have furnished antecedents for the stewed hominy, potages, pileaus, and "Hoppin' John" that sea island slaves cooked in iron pots and served in ceramic bowls. The spade of the archeologist confirms the memory of ex- slaves of Tidewater Georgia in the late 1930s who recalled how the old folks fresh from Africa sat on the ground and ate with their fingers out of a bowl. African foodways also influenced whites. Many insist that okra soup doesn't taste right

unless it is cooked slowly in an earthenware vessel. A good black cook created more than a satisfying meal; she also perpetuated an African- derived culture.

Men of Iron

From the early years of the colony men of African origin labored as blacksmiths in the manufacture of iron goods. In the rural areas their skill was needed in the making of nails, hinges, screws, bolts, rakes, tubs, weights, and all other metal goods. In the town the ironmaster became a specialist in great demand as able black workers labored together developing their own craft traditions. Skill in the foundry was a two- edged sword - - literally; slave blacksmiths supplied the Denmark Vesey insurrection of 1822 with daggers, bayonets, pikes, and swords.

Charleston, like New Orleans, became famous for its delicate nineteenth century wrought iron work. Black and white craftsmen were employed in the production of such ornamental masterpieces as the gates of St. Philips Church, Hibernian Hall, and the famous Sword Gate. "Uncle Toby" Richardson, a top rank artist in iron, was the leader of five African American workmen who carried out his plans.

The tradition still lived in the twentieth century in Philip Simmons, a modern ornamental ironworker of Charleston who learned his trade from Peter Simmons (no kin), an ex- slave, who in turn learned from his father Guy Simmons. Philip's tremendous vision is the first step in the creative process; he trains his eyes and hands to reproduce the image in his mind, sketches it on paper, then draws it in chalk. Yet as the metal parts are forged, his mental picture is modified. The struggle in his mind to make his vision clear lends vitality to his creations, such as his repeated efforts to get the eye of the snake to look alive. Just as he recognizes that no two leaves in nature are identical, he produces individual leaves in the ironwork of a screen partition. As he works and views the product of his labor he says repeatedly:

"That's got it; that's the one; that's the one." It is tempting to derive specific forms in colonial ironwork from African ancestors. One eighteenth century wrought- iron statue found in slave quarters in Alexandria, Virginia, with linear body and limbs expressing the essence of the human form, bears a striking resemblance to the sculpture of the Bamana of Mali. The copper rice tester, plunged into the depth of a full barrel to determine its quality, is similar to the ceremonial Po spoon or rice scoop of Liberia handed down through generations as an honorific emblem of the chief's mother or wife. But the few links in the chain of metal work of the Gullah people and their African ancestors are nebulous and modified by time and necessity.The designs of the Carolina craftsmen are essentially Euro- American dictated by the needs and tastes of whites. The African heritage and ability, guided by improvisation, combined with them to create a unique symphony in iron.

Wood Carving

Cooper of Yamacraw near Savannah well deserved his nickname "Stick Daddy" for his carving of slender walking sticks with reptilian designs. Lifelike snakes, lizards, or alligators appear to crawl up these canes, made more realistic by low relief and a stain that distinguishes them from the background wood. William Rogers of Darien carved a heavy cane topped by a man's head with small, high- set ears, broad mouth, and eyes of blue beads held in by minute steel nailheads as short little arms and four- fingered hands clutch the sides of the bust. Below is a carefully executed alligator stretched vertically against the shaft, as though climbing on the man's trunk. Its limbs grasping the sides, a grid of incisions to replicate scales on its back, and beads for eyes, enhance the graphic yet stylized portrait of the animal.

Equally impressive is a wooden frog carved by Rogers which looks as if it is about to catch an insect. Its powerful shoulders lift the massive, rounded body above the base; eyes of beads, secured by minute brass nails for pupils, set in the triangular head, give a realistic feel to the sculpture. Craftsmen also made utilitarian objects, such as a wooden spoon with a sculpted head on the top.

Wood carving and bead- work are well known throughout Africa; natives mix a main medium such as wood with a minor one such as beads. The human and animal figures from the Georgia coast are reminiscent of the mixed media found in the statuary of the Songye and BaKongo of Central Africa and tribes of the Cameroons and Nigeria. Although similar decorated canes come from Holland and from American Indians, the abundance and arrangement of reptiles in carvings from coastal Georgia strongly suggest their likely connection to the ceremonial staffs sculptured throughout Africa. Among the BaKongo, lusumu, special sharp- pointed staffs with idiographic symbols in low relief, combine the function of a walking stick and a stylus. As *suma* means to dig with a pointed stick or to discover, the double meaning is revealed as elders dig with a stick to bring to light hidden issues of the past.

The human figure carved on the Georgia coast is treated in a manner similar to that found all over Africa. Polished surfaces, symmetrical postures, geometrical incisions, and serpentine flutings proclaim the trans- Atlantic continuity. One Savannah- made cane that displays a mask form with long spiraling horns and eyes set on sharp raking angles is strongly reminiscent of an Ogoni mask from Nigeria. The face on another is similar to the Poro masks of the Dan people of Liberia and the Ivory Coast. Painting in only one color and carefully smoothed and luminous surfaces are typical of finishing on both sides of the Atlantic.

Beyond all of the content and art style is the mystique behind the wooden figures. Like the snakes that coil around the walking sticks, magic and religion coil around every facet of life of the sea islanders; canes with entwined serpents are called "conjure sticks." Since magic and healing are also interwoven here as in Africa, reptiles may well be employed to ward off the harm of evil spirits, illness, and death. Societies along the Congo River believe that enemies appear in the form of crocodiles and snakes; traditional African American healers cure their patients by presenting them with the cause of their illness in tangible reptilian form. Allen Parker near Savannah, both a sculptor and a conjuror, illustrated this synthesis of art and magic.

The inspiration, skill, style, and symbolism underlying the wood figures of the Tidewater are evidently derived from West and Central Africa. The techniques and many of the forms owe much to the western bulge of the continent, but the deepest meaning stems largely from the Congo- Angola region.

One black wood carver said that the inspiration for his work came as a personal vision. This mystical element, improvisation, and sensitivity for texture combined to produce artistic wooden sculpture on both sides of the Atlantic; practical demands shaped this sculpture in the New World.

Boats and Fishing

The myriad waterways that wind around the sea islands made travel by boat a necessity from the earliest days of settlement, and the teeming fish provided sustenance as well. Blacks have served on these waters as guides, oarsmen, and fishermen for three centuries.

The dugout canoe, usually attributed to the Indians, was also shaped by Europeans and by Africans. The Native Americans used a single log, dug or burned out the center, and left it blunt at both ends; the Euro- Americans modified it, pointing one or both ends. Such double- ended dugouts are also well known in Africa from Senegal to Angola where skilled seamen have used them for ages.

The Carib Indians of the West Indies made a multiple log boat from several hewn pieces of wood. The French word "pirogue" for this Carib vessel became the piragua, periagua, or pettiauger familiar on the Carolina coast. Made from giant cypress trees, it was described at least as early as 1709 by John Lawson. Sometimes in both Africa and America a sail was added. The bateau or batoe, a flat-bottomed boat with a square stern made of boards that curve upward at the ends and sides to make a bow, may have evolved from the dugout on the sea islands where it was common into the twentieth

century. From earliest days blacks not only navigated these boats but also built them, calling upon skills taught in their homeland as well as techniques of Indians and Europeans.

Many Africans, near the coast or lakes, were also experienced fishermen; they readily transferred their talents to the catching of seafood on the Carolina shores where "Fishing Negroes" emerged early in the eighteenth century. Some of them even followed the West African practice of damming a stream, adding a toxin to the waters, and then catching the fish, stunned but nonetheless edible.

Men of the Gold Coast and the Carolina coast are equally adept at the ancient art of catching shrimp or fish with a net. In one clever technique, fishermen of the sea islands rap on the side of a boat or on a drum with increasing rhythm, attracting porpoises who circle the boat and scare fish into their nets. Natives of West Africa off Cape Mirik use a similar acoustic signal, slapping the water to get porpoises to herd mullet into their nets. Significantly, on the Sea Islands in the winter, when men knit new nets and repair old ones, they use a needle of palmetto wood, much as they do in Nigeria.

Quilts as Cryptic Chronicles

Necessity is the mother of invention. Textiles, initially imported into the colony of Carolina, were soon made from local materials. Although silk cultivation was attempted as early as 1699, and wool and flax were woven, cotton would become the major fabric for clothing and for the household. On the plantations skillful slaves became adept at spinning and weaving, embroidering, knitting and dressmaking, using the materials and techniques presented by the white masters. Yet the African heritage was expressed nowhere more clearly than in quilts, all the more surprising since these padded bed covers came to America from chilly England and Holland, known there since the Middle Ages. However, winters in Carolina could be cold, so the need for warmth, the presence of fabric, and the nimble fingers of Africans made bedfellows - - literally.

Created from any available scraps of cloth of assorted shapes, sizes, and colors, quilts represent the ultimate in the blend of economy, practicality, and esthetics; the very placement of the scraps of varied design and color have a dramatic effect. Most characteristic of the Sea Islands is the "strip quilt," pieced work in which the rectangular bits of cloth are first sewn into a long strip. The back is cut from lightweight material; batting is placed between the layers as the quilt is stretched on wooden frames. The colors in a quilt convey a deeper meaning than meets the eye, connected to the beliefs and values of the sea island people, as they are in Africa. Red indicates danger, conflict, passion; blue repels bad spirits; white suggests innocence and purity.

Symbolism in design is equally significant. The cross in quilts in the Americas and the Caribbean is not necessarily a Christian symbol. In one quilt made on Johns Island a cross with large, pink arms, contrasting with a dark blue off- center middle section, was seen by residents there as representing danger, evil, and bad feelings. Crosses, reminiscent of the Four Moments of the Sun, could well have found their way into coastal Carolina from Congo and Angola; slave quilters of the past found ways to disguise an African cosmology in their patterns. In contrast to the centrality and symmetry of the squared off designs of European American quilts, the patterns of the African American ones are more undulating or curvilinear. A staggered strip formation conveys spontaneity; what appears random expresses a freedom of improvisation. The symphony woven into cloth is comparable to the syncopation woven into music. On a more subtle and unconscious level undulating lines correspond to that oblique or indirect manner in personal contacts and modes of speech often found in African American interactions. The illustrations in the book by Fry aptly named *Stitched from the Soul* show that slaves could sew regular, conventional patterns as well as spontaneous ones.

In the Sea Islands quilts communicate affection and celebrate family history – a marriage, birth, or departure for school. When one accompanies a departing family member, it is a reminder of the powerful ties of kinship. "Members of a family can identify the patches and can tell whose clothing, drapes, or household cloths they were before they did final duty in the quilt tops...The quilts are

cryptic chronicles, readable only by those who are initiated into the lexicon and context of the familial documents involved. They are an historical record, a primary source, coming directly out of the life of the family – only understood by them and possibly treasured all the more because of it."

Putting together a quilt is more than a craft. A quilting bee is a traditional social event with food and drink, gossip and song, that brings together families and neighbors and strengthens the feeling of communality. In the past, quilting also provided an outlet for the slaves, establishing a kind of emotional stability and independence, a means of gaining perspective and control.

The link with Africa becomes apparent when the philosophy as well as the fabrics of that continent are examined. With natural fibers so abundant, cotton, wool, and silk were woven in the great kingdoms of the Western Sudan in the Middle Ages. Not only the looms and the colors in the cloth are similar, but also the role of the family in creating the product and improvisation as the guiding spirit in design.

Quilts of the Sea Islands show striking resemblance in their patterns to the fabrics of West Africa, especially those of Ghana and Benin, where men weave cloth into long narrow strips, cut into usable lengths and edge- sewn together. The appliquéd figures in the distinctive cloths of the Fon of Benin (formerly Dahomey) represent events in the history of the people, the African analog to the cryptic chronicle stitched into the quilts of the sea islanders. In the Congo, cloth woven in the past from raffia, a form of palm, became a major export, along with ivory, hides, and slaves, in trade with the Portuguese. Undoubtedly the influence of these ethnic groups survived in the Gullah- speaking people. Just as in folklore, proverbs, intonations in speech, and face vessels, quilts provided slaves with an opportunity to express subtle meanings hidden from their white rulers. Originality against a backdrop of design was molded to practical needs in the textiles created by the sea island people.

Row Upon Row

Nowhere is the re- creation of the skill, the technique, and even the material of an African craft shown more vividly than in the weaving of baskets on the coast of Carolina. Several ladies, like Mary Jane Manigault, weave and sell baskets to tourists along Highway 17 in Mt. Pleasant across the Cooper River from Charleston. Fingers first bend a bundle of grasses into a knot, then coil a thin and flexible binder around it to make a tight bundle. Row upon row, with patience and precision, she twists the grass bundle into an ever widening clockwise circle, turning later coils slightly upward to build the bowl.

The most commonly used foundation today is sweetgrass (*Muhlenbergia filipes*), a long- stemmed plant that grows beside the marshes of coastal Carolina. For variety of color the dark brown needles of the long- leafed pine (*Pinus palustris*) alternate with this golden yellow grass. Binding the coils together in a rhythmic spiral are strips of leaves of palm (*Sabal palmetto*). The tool for punching the hole for the binder, now usually the handle of a filed down spoon, is called a "bone," for it once was an animal bone. What a variety of articles they produce in so many shapes and sizes - - round baskets and oval baskets, sewing baskets, market baskets and clothes baskets, fruit baskets with handles, baskets with lids, and elaborate vases for flowers; open work hampers and cake trays; hats and mats; and baskets with filigrees and secondary coils and endless innovations. The weaving of baskets, like the making of quilts, is often a family affair and a social event. Women generally make them, young boys help, men gather the materials, and some weave too. Oldsters teach youngsters, thus preserving a family tradition.

When rice dominated the economy, baskets were common. Mentioned in a will in 1730, they may have been in use as early as the seventeenth century. Essential for processing the grain was the "fanner," a circular, shallow, dish- like basket nearly two feet across. When the threshed and pounded grain from the fanner is thrown up into the air, the wind blows away the chaff. Like the deeper storage basket of the times, it was generally made of black rush, bound with white oak or saw palmetto.

Baskets were used in those days for harvesting and winnowing corn, for benne seed and sorghum seed, for carrying corn and peas and other produce, for sewing, and even for collecting money in church.

The value of basket- making is proven by the record of the times. The *Charleston Gazette and Advertiser* for February 15, 1791, announced the public auction of "A Negro Man, who is a good jobbin' carpenter and an excellent basket maker." Some slaves created baskets not only for their own plantation but for sale elsewhere; men no longer fit for heavier work could weave baskets. Indians also made baskets, but the style of weaving and their usage were different. Native Americans strapped a basket to the back by a rope across the forehead; sea islanders carried it on the head like their African ancestors. The art of basketry declined with the demise of rice cultivation, but northern teachers who came south trained young people at Penn School in the art and later African

African American women created today's thriving markets along Highway 17 and in Charleston. Across the Atlantic lies one source of this craft. Most of the plant fibers used, palm and grasses, grow widely in Africa; many baskets made there are much like those of the sea islands in the coiling technique, in the manner of stitching, and in their use, if not in their color accents. But coiled rice fanners are unique to Senegal and could be interchanged for those on the Sea Islands. While the concept of the early baskets likely came from Central Africa, the predominant influence probably entered the colony with rice cultivation from Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the coast south of it, and diffused widely over the rice kingdom. Baskets, like boats, illustrate the complex interweave of African, European, and Native American traditions that enriched the life of the Gullah.

In Memoriam

Of all the artifacts of the Tidewater, those associated with the awesome mystery of death reveal the most profound and moving retention of the meaning of life. Broken bottles and other ornaments in an African American cemetery are expressions of religion and magic; anything from a pitcher or tumbler to a clock or lamp chimney is piled upon the earth. Closer inspection may reveal a small headstone marking an individual grave. In light of the meaning behind this clustered assortment, it seems a sacrilege to call them grave decorations, for they are an integral part of the belief system of the interred and those who buried them -- offerings to the deceased, yes, but much more. Like the ancient pharaohs, these dead must be given whatever they may need in the next world lest the spirit come back.

Antecedents for this funeral practice have a long history throughout West and Central Africa. Bosman observed earthenware images placed on top of the grave at Axim on the coast of modern Ghana in the early 1700s; the Ekoi of southeastern Nigeria buried devotees of the goddess Nimm under a stick framework with the belongings of the deceased suspended beneath. The Akan people of Ghana and the Ivory Coast honor their dead by placing on the grave pottery, wooden cooking vessels, and terra-cotta portraits. The deceased of the Yoruba today are often buried in the floor of the house and the site marked on an adjacent wall by an embedded china plate.

The most impressive use of objects on the grave comes from Central Africa. In 1884 Glave noted in the Congo that "natives mark the final resting place of their friends by ornamenting their graves with crockery, empty bottles, old cooking pots, etc., etc., all of which articles are rendered useless by being cracked or penetrated with holes." The image of death, the end of things within this world, is indicated by piercing the bottom of a porcelain mug to be placed on the grave. Whether in the Congo or in South Carolina, spiritual presence and surveillance can be summoned by placing on the surface of a tomb china figurines, pitchers, and mugs associated with the departed. To incise the lozenge-shaped Cosmogram, the horizontal line of the cross within a circle that divides the world of the living from that of the dead, upon the side of a terra- cotta grave marker cuts through the materiality of the objects treated and links them to their spiritual doubles, completing the circle of the sun within the kingdom of the dead.

Like the fountain which retains its form even as the drops of water change, Kongo art for the dead remains the same even as it incorporates new expressions in cloth, stone, or terra- cotta. Kongo tombs become ritual earthworks, conceptual doors to another universe, an intricate field of mediatory signs, materially simple but conceptually rich. The inverted bottles around a Kongo chief's grave make an enclosure or luumbu, transcending time and space, which shields the dead from outside forces and protects the living from the emanations of his power. Echoes of the concept of the tomb as a courtyard or enclosure are found in Carolina when shells mark the grave.

Shells have special meaning in the metaphysics of the Kongo people; they imply immortality through a pun, for *zinga* means both "spiral- form shell" and "to live long." In old days, they conceived of hiding the soul in shells; pressing them into the earth, they prayed: "When you leave for the sea, take me along, that I may live forever with you." Compare that with the words of a black woman from St. Simons Island, Georgia: "The shells stand for the sea. The sea brought us, the sea shall take us back. So the shells upon our graves stand for water, the means of glory and the land of demise." Moored like a transparent vessel through which the grasses of this Tidewater area penetrate, the circle of shells encloses a single broken axis of further shells and flowers. The inner axis is studded with signs of love (the flowers), stretching in a line to guide the spirit, with respect and honor, into the other world.

Those mirrors and other pieces of glass that glitter on top of the grave convey a similar symbolic meaning. Flashing mirrors and glass play a similar role on the graves of blacks in Africa and America. Taken from the dead man's house they hold the spirit at safe distance from the living. A lamp or fragment of a lamp chimney serves a symbolic purpose, for the Kongo lit bonfires on the grave to lead the souls of the departed into the next world.

The last objects used by the deceased are important because his last strength resides in them. To touch them is to receive powerful messages from the dead communicated in dreams; placing them on the grave grounds their awesome potentiality. As one resident of St. Helena explained, even the last drops of medicine remaining from a sick person should be allowed to drain into the earth above the grave to assure healing in the other world and avoid displacement of the spirit. A pipe for smoking or a water pipe also has a symbolic meaning. The stem of either one, found on graves on both sides of the Atlantic, serves to bridge two worlds, one through smoke and the other through water. In the land of the Kongo a tree planted on the grave is a symbol of immortality, for it continues to live even while its roots, moored to the earth, indicate the kingdom of the dead. In 1850 William Cullen Bryant, visiting South Carolina, noted that "a few trees, tailing with long moss, rise above hundreds of nameless graves" of blacks. Myriad examples exist today along the coast; a pine tree soaring from the middle of a grave equals the immortal spirit of the deceased. From a million graves rises a silent plea for understanding of a people, their burden, and their heritage.

The many currents that played upon the material culture of coastal South Carolina and Georgia for two centuries may never be distinguished. Examples cited here are indications, but certainly not proof, of any direct connection of any specific African region to the Low Country. Unless future research on both sides of the ocean uncovers comparable influences from the western bulge of the continent, it is a safe bet that the Congo- Angola area had an early, pervasive, profound, and lasting effect upon the artifacts of the Tidewater, as it did upon the lexicon and fundamental beliefs of its people.

The material culture of Africa was retained on the coast of Carolina and Georgia because this holdover of memories and talents was useful to blacks and whites alike. Objects with symbolic meaning and emotional impact for blacks, like the cross on quilts or grave- markers, beyond the comprehension of whites, gave added impetus to their survival. Like language and culture, artifacts were re- created in the Sea Islands from African sources, sometimes influenced by Native American crafts, and molded by the customs and economic needs of Europeans into something new and unique.

The events in the latter half of the twentieth century have brought further change to the sea islanders, often threatening their way of life.

Chapter 7 Revelations: From Darkness into Light

***Ain't you got a right to the tree of life?* - - Guy and Candie Carawan**

For generations the same peaceful way of life continued, filled with hard work but self- sufficiency and satisfaction. Fishermen flung their nets into creek and ocean to catch crabs, shrimp, and fish, and gathered oysters and clams. Farmers hoed the sandy soil to grow vegetables and cotton. Winter was the time for sewing clothes and quilts and mending nets. Evenings and weekends were ideal for the telling of folktales, for basket making, for song and dance, and for the expression of that religious faith and hope, which, like the Gullah speech itself, united the people and reflected their African heritage.

From Civil War to Civil Rights

After the upheaval of the Civil War and the changes of the Reconstruction era from 1865 through 1877, the Sea Islands experienced relative stability to the end of the century. Following the demise of rice and cotton cultivation, truck farming and tree farming arose in the area. Despite the migration of African Americans from the fields of the South to the cities of the North, beginning after World War I, the population of the Sea Islands remained rather stable and overwhelmingly black through the first half of the twentieth century. Even in the mid 1950s most natives remained on their local island. In a Charleston clinic where 19 out of 20 black patients interviewed by the author were born in the coastal tier of counties, 85 percent of their parents had also been born there, usually in the same small locality.

Yet the building of bridges and roads, beginning in the 1930s, led in time to commuting and erosion of the isolation that had produced a unique culture. Federal projects created more arable land, improved farming practices, and increased productivity, but pushed residents off the land and introduced a cash- based society. The shift from a barter to a money economy altered the culture and social structure of the Gullah people. More profound change followed the purchase of large tracts of land on Hilton Head Island for their timber in 1950. Entrepreneurs began to consolidate cheap land and "tax land" on the Sea Islands. Through family inheritance everyone had received a small portion of property; relatives who had moved to New York were offered a small cash settlement for their "heir rights." When tax values rose on waterfront property beyond the financial capacity of Gullah farmers, a "friendly corporation" would pay the tax, buy up the land, and force the natives to move. By 1980 whites outnumbered blacks on Hilton Head five to one. But as Beoku- Betts expressed it, "You can't move the culture and traditions from one area and plant it in another. You can't move Papa from here, sit him in the middle of Atlanta, and say, 'Make your cast net.'"

Between 1930 and 1980, even as the number of blacks on the Sea Islands increased, the percentage declined, especially after the 1950s and on the islands closest to the city. In 1930 on St. Helena, the most populous island, twenty- four out of every twenty- five people were black. But by 1980 with little change in the total number only three out of every five people there were black. Johns Island, further away from the city, tells a similar story; although its black population gradually increased, the percentage of the total fell from 87 to 43. On James Island, even though blacks more than doubled their number in that half century, their percentage of the total fell from 79 to 22 as so many white people settled in this area. By 1990, islands nearer Charleston were dramatically different in composition and appearance, although on Edisto and Wadmalaw and the area near McClellanville blacks still outnumbered whites more than two to one.

Where rice fields and shacks once dominated the low and level landscape, exclusive high- rise resorts are now surrounded by imposing walls. "No Trespassing" signs bar natives from the roads they once traveled. Developers threaten the fragile environment and the historic way of life of the black natives

who remain. Blacks who fed table scraps to their hogs or failed to remove junk from their yards have even been fined. The number of those weaving traditional baskets on the islands has declined as the needed sweetgrass has been killed by chemical pollutants, and those practicing folk medicine and speaking Gullah has decreased greatly in recent years.

Yet there is hope as natives have become more aware of their rights and opportunities, and new organizations seek to preserve their way of life. The South Carolina Coastal Conservation League and the Neighborhood Legal Assistance Program offer help on land use planning. The Sea Island Preservation Project, launched by Penn Center, trains residents to balance environmental protection and cultural preservation with responsible development. Saving a culture goes hand in hand with saving an ecology.

Political rights also go hand in hand with social and economic justice. During the twelve years of Reconstruction some blacks had achieved positions of prominence and power. But after Union troops left in 1877, white southerners regained control and established segregation of blacks by Jim Crow laws. Whereas the South Carolina Constitution of 1868 had given African Americans the largest political rights, the Constitution of 1895 was for the express purpose of taking them away. It effectively banned blacks from voting through literacy and property tests, and mandated separate schools. There were two sets of everything from churches and schools to restaurants and drinking fountains based on skin color throughout the state and the South.

Septima Clark, a black woman born in Charleston in 1898, was a major driving force in changing that. When she was fired as a school teacher in 1955 for belonging to the NAACP, she discovered Highlander School in Tennessee that was concerned with African Americans, and soon began training others in passive resistance to racial barricades. In 1957 she and Esau Jenkins began a citizenship education school on Johns Island to involve black people in the political process. With patience and persistence, despite threats and attempted bribes, they promoted literacy and voter registration, making blacks aware of their rights and potential power. The training of school teachers spread throughout the south, a spearhead of the civil rights movement. When the folksinger Guy Carawan came to Johns Island in 1959, he was immediately impressed with the cultural heritage of the sea islanders, especially their music. Spirituals, folk tales, and game songs performed by the Moving Star Hall Singers were spread over the country in person and by recordings. The song "Keep Your Hand on the Plow" evolved into "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize," a spiritual that became one of the great inspirational themes of the civil rights movement of the sixties. As the title of Carawan's book of pictures and quotations from the people of Johns Island expressed it, "*Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?*"

The Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care Corporation grew out of the Rural Mission and Progressive Club started by Esau Jenkins. Through clinics in the Sea Islands and those at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, African Americans are enjoying better health care today, a major building stone in the quality of life. As more people survive the pestilences of the past that slaughtered so many in their prime, chronic diseases of maturer age take their deadly toll. Not long ago heart disease conjured up a picture of the hard- driving white male, but with changing lifestyles and an aging population, mortality from cardiovascular illness has risen dramatically, especially among blacks and females. The Charleston Heart Study, following 2,283 adults for thirty years, showed no significant difference in death rates between the races; among women only, blacks actually had a somewhat greater mortality and higher systolic blood pressure than whites.

The picture from Africa is revealing. Nigerian women have more “apple- shape” obesity, with big waists, than their African American counterparts, but without the elevated systolic blood pressure of U.S. blacks. Cardiovascular disease there has been rare- - until recently. With changing lifestyles, with greater stress and high fat diets, these diseases are on the increase. They are low in rural areas, where people retain tribal customs, and high in the city, where western ways are adopted. Perhaps

Americans can learn something from Africans. Ongoing research at the Medical University of South Carolina also sheds light on such ethnic diseases such as diabetes and osteoporosis. Greater awareness of life- threatening factors, wider education, better facilities, early intervention, better diet, improved lifestyles, and race relations that minimize stress can increase health and longevity for the sea island people and for all African Americans. Good health requires a sound mind as well as a sound body. Vital ingredients include independence, self esteem, and confidence, with hope for the future and pride in the heritage of the past.

The African Heritage

From countless villages they came, speaking dozens of tongues, from the banks of the Gambia River through the forests of the Congo. Usually young, chained and frightened, they were thrust into the hold of a crowded, stinking slave ship and brought four thousand miles to the shores of Carolina and Georgia, directly or through the West Indies. Over two hundred thousand in all came to labor in the fields, shops, and homes of an alien land. With them came skills and memories, beliefs and practices of their homeland. They learned to adapt to strange ways, preserve yet modify their speech and customs, and shape new materials to their own needs and those of the masters. Isolated on large plantations with little migration, most blacks on the sea islands retained their biological and cultural heritage. Rice, that dominated and characterized South Carolina from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century, was one of many crops that illustrates America's debt to Africans, for slaves were imported for their experience in growing it, especially from Sierra Leone.

The Gullah language, marked by unique intonation and rhythm as well as syntax and lexicon from African languages and English, remains the most characteristic feature of the sea islanders. The African emphasis upon kinship persisted in the New World to provide social and economic strength and the Old World love of communal living. Religion, clothed in Christianity, retained ancient African gods, faith, and practices, to provide the strongest possible spiritual support. Baptism in the river united the initiate with ancestors and nature spirits of the past as well as the society of the present. The funeral must insure that no troubled ghost of the deceased returns to haunt the living. Both the joy and the sorrow of life were celebrated in music. Like their African forebears, the sea island people expressed rhythm in their singing and dancing, often tied to religious ecstasy as in the ring shout. The spiritual, born of the Biblical hope of freedom and salvation, brought out the finest timbre of the African voice and enriched American music. Folklore of the Sea Islands, re- created with gestures before a responsive audience, preserved African memories, relieved the monotony of slavery, and permitted a sly jab at white masters.

The African feel for texture, familiarity with natural materials, pride of workmanship, improvisation, and necessity combined in the Low Country to produce creative crafts: baskets, quilts, ceramics, wrought iron, wood, and boats. Nowhere is African belief better expressed than in those varied objects of broken glass and shells placed upon the grave that shield the deceased and return his spirit to his gods and forebears.

The cultural traits most retained, although modified, in the sea islands were faith and feelings which promoted survival and did not conflict with the demands of white masters; they were best expressed in the bonds of the extended family, in religion and magic, in music and folklore. The language and culture that developed in the Sea Islands were more than retention, more than a mixture, but a creative synthesis borne of memory, necessity, and improvisation in a new environment. With it all, the people preserved an indomitable spirit that was never crushed by labor or lash, by poverty or prejudice. The flame that flickered never died out and lives on today along the coast. Blacks also had a continuing effect on whites on the Sea Islands as they did throughout the South. Along with gene flow went the influence of African Americans on the speech and culture of European Americans. Throughout the years of slavery and beyond, through house servants especially, whites derived some African heritage as blacks derived a European one. White children, brought up by black mammies,

absorbed stories and songs from Africa along with cuisine, affection, discipline, manners, and a deference to elders. Health involves more than the body.

As essential as good genes, nourishing food, and freedom from microbes are, health also rests upon the human spirit. Belief is vital for healing. The wisdom of ancient Africa continues to play a significant role in the lives of the sea islanders. Their courage, grace, and dignity, molded through years of hardship and the vicissitudes of life, give the Gullah people strength.

The sea islanders of today are threatened by the ever- increasing pace of modern life with its economic demands. They are not a museum piece, relics of the past, but rather survivors of enslavement, bondage, discrimination, and white privilege, fellow human beings entitled to work out their own destiny. Hopefully the best of sea island life, language, customs, and values can be preserved, even as the people take advantage of new opportunities and move into mainstream America.

The Gullah people can cherish individual differences and take pride in a unique heritage beneath the umbrella of our common humanity. They will then have the best of both worlds- - and set an example for others. The sea islands will then become more than the "see islands" for tourists; the Tidewater will reach its flood tide; and the Low Country will become the High Country of the African American experience.